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NOVELS.

N° XXXVII.

"No kind of literature is so generally attractive as Fiction. Pictures of life and manners, and Stories of adventure, are more eagerly received by the many than graver productions, however important these latter may be. APULEIUS is better remembered by his fable of Cupid and Psyche than by his abstruser Platonic writings; and the Decameron of BOCCACCIO has outlived the Latin Treatises, and other learned works of that author."

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, 8. NEW BURLINGTON STREE
(SUCCESSOR TO HENRY COLBURN):
BELL AND BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH;
CUMMING, DUBLIN; AND
GALIGNANI, PARIS.
1834.

LONDON:
Printed by A. SPOTTISWOODE,
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F. Pickering, pinx.t S. S. Smith, sculp.

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

A group of male peasants were busy with their cross bows attempting to bring down the triumphal garland suspended to the top of a lofty firpole.

London, Published by R. Bentley, 1834.

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

A NOVEL.

The penitent wanderer, with disordered tresses, rushed to the feet of the purblind dowager, who was obliged to put on her spectacles ere she could recognize the discarded offspring of her bosom.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY.
(SUCCESSOR TO H. COLBURN)
CUMMING, DUBLIN.- BELL & BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH.
GALIGNANI, PARIS.
1834.

MOTHERS

AND

DAUGHTERS;

A NOVEL.

What gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
When Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train,
Garters, and Stars, and Coronets appear,
And in soft sounds "Your Grace" salutes the ear!
Rape of the Lock.

LONDON:
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BELL AND BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH;
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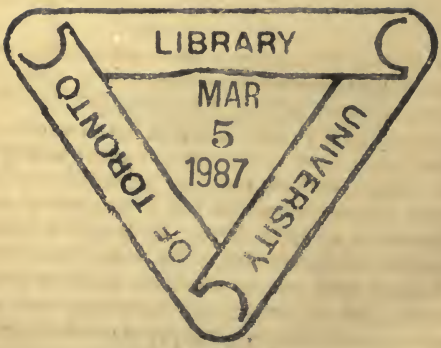
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MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

EUPHEMON. — Il aura mes biens aujourd'hui ;
Et son aîné n'aura pour tout partage
Que le courroux d'un père qu'il outrage
Il le mérite ; il fut dénaturé.
RONDON. — Ah ! vous l'aviez trop longtems enduré.
L'autre du moins agit avec prudence,
Mais cet aîné, quels traits d'extravagance !
L'Enfant Prodigue.

LADY MARIA WILLINGHAM was a person who, with indifferent features, had always managed to be called pretty ; with very moderate abilities, had maintained the reputation of being extremely clever ; and with a narrow selfish heart, was continually cited as the most excellent woman in the world. The tact which had thus universally enabled her to assume a virtue where she had it not, was of course a qualification of no feeble force. Early in her fashionable career it had been whispered to her, that a dress of the last new Parisian mode was an admirable mask for the body ; an earnest, and deliberate, and mysterious tone of conversation, a most imposing cloak for the deficiencies of the mind : and she was well aware that *the heart* is usually taken upon the trust of these preceding and more ostensible endowments. She therefore confined the demonstrations of her virtue to a refraignment from all sins unrecognised as of the highest *ton ;* and to a pathetic vibration of the head and elevation of the eyes, whenever the delinquencies of other people came under discussion.

In one respect Lady Maria had appeared to rise superior to her own failings, and to have suffered a remission of her callous egotism;—she had made what is called *a love match.* But love, like other sad dogs with an ill name, is rendered responsible for many a crime, in addition to his own unjustifiable criminalities; and if ever Cupid could have proved his innocence by an *alibi,* it was most assuredly in the instance of Charles Willingham's elopement with Lady Maria de Vesci! I have already asserted that she was neither handsome, clever, nor amiable. At the period of what was termed her "rash marriage," she was nearly five and twenty, with a portion of three thousand pounds, Irish currency; and attached, as a Bath and Cheltenham appendage, to a deaf mother, the dullest dowager extant throughout the united realms of Great Britain.

At Ramsgate, where, through her qualification of "ladyship," Lady Maria maintained a very creditable degree of ball-room precedency, the De Vescis became acquainted with Mr. Willingham, the eldest son of a family of opulence and county antiquity. He was fresh from college, or rather, he had still a term and a degree in prospective endurance; being three years younger than the fair tactician from Bruton Street, who had brought the faded looks and blighted hopes of another infructuous season to be repaired by the breezes of the Isle of Thanet. After dancing, riding, walking, and flirting together, with the assiduity becoming a watering place, Charles Willingham very properly fell in love, and Lady Maria very naturally fell into a fit of musing. She considered that her lady-mother was paralytic, that her lordly brother and his wife were far gone in severe evangelism, that her prospects were extremely precarious, and her means most unaristocratically limited; and in consequence of these lamentable coincidences, she thought it on the whole advisable to sigh and grow sentimental in honour of poor Charles and his honest passion; and to sanction with her smiles his application to his father for a maintenance, and to her own maternal countess-dowager for her hand.

Unfortunately the replies of both were unpropitious. Sir Claude Willingham, having a favourite second son, was

by no means anxious for the early marriage of his heir apparent, and consequently restricted his promise of an income for the young couple to a thousand a-year; and on the receipt of this almost interdictory intelligence, the dowager, whose head had been shaking for years past with the palsy, redoubled its movement in negative vehemence. "*Her* consent to such a miserable match for her dear Maria? Never!" She could not hear of it with patience.

Like other stupid old women, poor Lady de Vesci, however, contrived to defeat her own views on the subject. At all times a bore of the most stupendous magnitude, she grew thrice doubly tiresome under the irritations of the disaster which threatened her domestic peace. She concentrated all her prose into ceaseless diatribes against the folly and wickedness of improvident marriages, and the thriftless frivolity of the young men of the age; and she insisted on keeping her superannuated kitten perpetually under her own eye, in a stifling Ramsgate parlour—enlivened only by an elaborate effort in lamb's wool knitting, and the daily lecture of the Globe newspaper. Lady Maria had been long compelled to evening-casino;—it was now hinted as a morning recreation, by way of sedative. In vain did Charles Willingham languish on the pier, and mope upon the cliffs; her ladyship was secluded as strictly as a nun of any sisterhood in Spain. He fixed his gaze upon the daily airings of the dowager's chariot, and indited a sonnet thereupon; then thought of the Cambridge horrors of his ensuing term, until his grief absolutely expanded itself into elegiac stanzas! Both effusions, accompanied by an epistle in simple prose far more to the purpose, he bribed towards the dressing-table of Lady Maria; who, having no feelings of filial reluctance to subdue, finally ceded to the united influence of three such tender missives; and to escape from a dreary home and beggarly prospects, ran away with him on the following morning, and was always said to have perpetrated a love-match!—So much for the judgment of the world!

The young couple did not long persist in their undutiful alienation from the heads of their respective and respected houses; for they had not a guinea wherewith to maintain

the dignity of their "truant disposition." Lady Maria, an expert and insinuating pen-woman, soon prompted an exculpatory, but very submissive epistle from her husband to Sir Claude; and despatched another from her own fair hand to the dowager, such as would have done honour to the sensibilities of any Araminta or Adeliza in any novel throughout the lachrymose range of Lane and Newman's shelves; yet in defiance of the epistolary eloquence of both, no answer was returned to either! Affairs now became pressing. Even Charles Willingham's buoyant spirits failed to sustain themselves against the depressing spectacle of an empty purse and an increasing file of bills; and Lady Maria, by no means prepared to endure with patience the exigencies commonly consequent upon "a love match," considerately proposed that their sole remaining five pound note should convey them in a chaise and pair to Bruton Street.

According to the most approved precedents, the butler and footman were bribed—the forbidden door clandestinely opened—and the "penitent wanderer," with disordered tresses, rushed to the feet of the purblind dowager, who was obliged to put on her spectacles ere she could recognise the discarded offspring of her bosom. Lady Maria Willingham delivered her tale—whether unvarnished or not—with her accustomed plausible deliberation. She wept much, and expostulated not at all; dilating upon the deep remorse of her self-accusing filial tenderness; and including Lady de Vesci's favourite maid; her asthmatic pug—ay!—and even her Penelope's web of lamb's wool, among the affecting reminiscences of her repentance. The dowager, touched by so intimate a combination of domestic images, contented her righteous rage by the bitterest vituperation against the seducer of her innocent child; and before six o'clock the *trio* was seated at dinner together, in the friendly intimacy of her ladyship's stuffy boudoir—a reeking sudatorium, past the ascertainment of Réaumur or Fahrenheit.

Fortified by this encouragement, Mr. Willingham addressed a second letter to Heddeston Court; and Sir Claude was at length moved—and if by the spirit, by a very

angry one—to favour his penitent heir with a definite answer; acquainting him that the allowance of a thousand a-year originally promised, would be limited to five hundred, in consequence of the indecent disregard he had shown to public opinion, and to the long established respectability of his family. Sir Claude then digressed into a confession of his own political and religious faith, and an *obligato* flourish in honour of church and state, with which he was so much in the habit of embellishing his county addresses and electioneering clap-traps, that he found it difficult to put pen to paper without indulging in its cut-and-dried pomposities.

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" exclaimed Lady Maria, as she thrust the epistle into its franked envelope, and threw it on the dressing-table. "This letter is the announcement of our ruin!"

"Nay! dear Maria, do not let us look upon the dark side of things. Your mother has pressingly invited us to make her house our home, and we need therefore consider this niggardly allowance as only present pocket-money."

"A home! Yes! and a charming home it is; stifled with sick lap-dogs, a tribe of toad-eaters, and their nightly card-table,—and stunned from morning till night with the monotonous shrieks of a peevish parrot!"

"Dearest Maria! recollect for a moment the affectionate interest with which you used to talk to me at Ramsgate of the attractions of your beloved home!"

Lady Maria shrugged her shoulders.

"And of your duties towards the declining age of an excellent parent! All these may be now fulfilled; and lightened—may I not say so, dearest love?—by the companionship of a person faithfully and fondly attached to you."

"And even suppose, Charles, that we *do* resign ourselves to the slavery of boring on with mamma, she cannot live for ever; and I know Liniment has long thought her in a very declining way."

Young Willingham was rather shocked by this light allusion to the death of a parent, who, despite her foible for sick lap-dogs and loo-playing toadies, was still *a parent;*

—but it was uttered by the lips of his dearest Maria, and he forgave it.

"Liniment may be mistaken; and whenever the melancholy event really takes place, you will of course derive some slight advantages from Lady de Vesci's will, to replace her present kindness and generosity."

"Advantages! you are quite mistaken. Advantages! not a shilling! My mother has nothing but her jointure —has not saved a guinea, to my certain knowledge; and my brother will do nothing for me beyond the regular payment of my miserable pittance. What a prospect!"

"You have always told me," said Willingham, unwittingly, "that you were totally ignorant of the state of Lady de Vesci's affairs, and that your brother had often spoken of increasing your provision."

"Did I? You take things so literally! At all events, nothing can be more literal and positive than *your* father's letter; and nothing more certain than that till the death of Sir Claude, we have nothing to do but to starve on six hundred a-year."

"*Certain?* By no means! We must contrive, dearest Maria, that he should see you; that he should become acquainted with all your excellent and endearing qualities, and I am convinced that he will not persist in his opposition. My father, although a valetudinarian, was formerly esteemed one of the most polished men in England, and he is quite capable of appreciating your elegant mind and manners. Besides, love, supposing our income to be limited for a time, our ultimate prospects are secured by a strict entail; and then, how often have you assured me that competence with the man you love ——"

"Competence? — absurd! Charles, Charles, do not deceive yourself with set phrases. What you call competence, I call penury. However, it is too late to think about it now. Six hundred a-year! Heigho!"

And "heigho!" echoed the mortified Willingham, as he left the room, and consoled himself with the companionship of Lady de Vesci's fretful parrot; whose "set phrases" he began to think, for the first time, preferable to those of his own dearest Maria.

Her ladyship's prognostications, however, whether couched in set or random phrases, were strictly fulfilled. Lady de Vesci gradually dowagered away; every east wind filled her affectionate daughter with alarm; and not Pope himself could have "rocked the cradle of declining age" with a more tremulous solicitude than that which was instigated by Lady Maria's dread of forfeiture of her mother's handsome establishment and comfortable table. She was held up as a mirror of filial imitation to their remiss offspring by every dowager throughout the parishes of St. George and St. James. Nobody, indeed, could be more assiduously expert in placing the gorgeous Indian screen impervious to a draught; nobody more accurately versed in the mysteries of chicken-panada! But all would not do. In spite of her watchful vigilance, in spite of Liniment's co-operative care, poor paralytic Lady de Vesci died in the agitation of her first grandchild's first tooth. I say *grandchild* in all its neutral indefinity; because I am unwilling to admit, that a person so provident as Lady Maria Willingham could have been guilty of producing a *daughter* in utter disregard of the Heddeston Court entail!

A daughter, however, it was; and before its discontented mother had recovered the horrible crisis of her ejection from the comfortable domicile of Bruton Street, which now, by a reminiscent figure of speech, became once more "her beloved home;" before she had tamed down her endurance to her damp cottage at Chiswick, and the tough roast mutton which forms the legitimate nutriment of a love match, *a second* came to magnify the sum total of her disasters! Two little Miss Willinghams in less than three years;—and Charles pretending to be so fond of them too—just by way of contradiction!

The budding of this second female olive branch, meanwhile, determined Mr. Willingham to make a second appeal to his father's liberality; but as he had formerly prospered so ill in his written manifesto of misfortune, he resolved, in the present instance, to try the effect of *vivâ voce* solicitation. Having considerably improved in familiar tactics under Lady Maria's tuition, he had become aware that it is much easier to *write* "no" than to say it, particularly

to one's own and eldest son. He put himself accordingly into the mail; and, just as daylight began to glimmer over the goodly hop-grounds of the county of Kent, he alighted at the Three Fiddlers, the highly unpoetical ensign of the inn at Heddeston, the family at the court being much too ancient, and too highly established, to seek or endure the vulgar propitiation of "the Willingham Arms" in their own especial and feudal village.

Poor Charles had many sufferings to undergo in this retreat of rural indulgence, besides the company of the exciseman and tax-gatherer, the perfumes of punch and tobacco, and the gritty tenure of a sanded floor, which he had patiently anticipated. After a due encounter with the respectful recognition of the tap-room and its presidency, he had to learn that he was pretty universally regarded as a disgraced and exherited member of the house of Willingham; while his younger brother, who, by a precipitate union with the daughter of his private tutor, had certainly "defied the opinion of the world, and outraged the prejudices of his family," in a degree far more flagrant than that of his own delinquencies — was comfortably settled under his father's roof-tree, with a full and unlimited dominion over park and chase, cellar and buttery, treasury and rent-roll, throughout the liberties of Heddeston and its court! Mine host of the Fiddlers naturally accompanied this advertisement of mischance with the ancient and appropriate saw, which forbids one man to look over a gate, and permits another to abduct the steed from its pasture; and poor Charles was fain to admit the plausibility of the dictum.

But Mr. Willingham had not journeyed sixty miles to content himself with the philosophy of a village hostel. It is written that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in" even that of the Danish Horatio; and Charles earnestly trusted that there might be consolations in store for him in his father's mansion, beyond the conjectures of the tap-room of the Fiddlers. Accordingly, after the performance of certain tonsorial, lavatorial, and masticatorial duties, he set forward upon his humiliating errand; and arrived at the lodge of Heddeston Court in a

plight but ill becoming the heir of all its dignities. He found himself, however, warmly, and even affectionately, welcomed by the old retainers of the house; to whom the remembrance of his boyish inconsideration remained the more precious, from the contrast it afforded with Mr. Joseph's parsimonious habits and chilling reserve. Dependents are more frequently attached to us by our failings than by our virtues.

Charles Willingham was conscious of a painful thrill of reminiscence on entering the old hall. It was very early; none but the domestics were yet astir; yet, even among these, he found himself greeted by a far more eager burst of sympathy than had been personally bestowed upon him since his departure from his hereditary home. Lady Maria was an iceberg, compared with the old housekeeper who had formerly officiated as his nurse; and the tears which graced the eyes of the old steward, the butler, and the body coachman — who had been the equestrian professor of his youth — fairly put him out of conceit with the refrigerated hospitality of Lord and Lady de Vesci, his solemn brother and sister in law. He almost wished, for a moment, that he had brought his two little girls with him. He felt that perhaps even they might be loved and caressed at Heddeston!

But this visionary triumph was not destined to endure; the breakfast-hour and Joseph Willingham soon arrived to disenchant his imagination, and all was Spitzbergen again! Joseph received his brother with a very sincere and cordial demonstration of displeasure at his arrival. The interest of every pathetic history requires that it should have a villain to boast of; but although the younger Willingham's was a decidedly villanous position; although he was in truth "the mildewed ear blighting his wholesome brother," yet he had not the energy, the stamina, the *character* of which villains are composed. He was a miserable being — strong only in selfishness — and incapable of injuring a fellow-creature, unless his personal interests were influenced by the deed. Unfortunately those of Charles stood in immediate competition with his own, and they were therefore pre-ordained to sacrifice.

For the preservation of all those who might be exposed to a similar warfare on the part of Joseph Willingham, Providence had gifted him with a singular tendency to the garrulous expounding of his own tactics. He was so pleased with his own prudence, so enamoured of his own plans, so persuaded of the excellence of his own theory of domestic management, that he could not refrain from the betrayal of all its littleness, and all his own egotism. "I certainly should not have closeted myself in such an inactive profession of the church," he would say, "only it would have been a thousand pities to let such a fine family living as Heddeston go to my cousin John." Or in an October sale of a horse to a particular friend, he would acknowledge, "I am aware that you get it five pounds too cheap; but you see it would have eaten its head off during the winter."

In his fraternal colloquy with Charles he was scarcely less explicit of his views and feelings. They breakfasted *tête-à-tête;* for Sir Claude habitually, and Mrs. Joseph incidentally, were too much indisposed to leave their chambers; and Charles Willingham, as he cast his eyes upon the redundant repast and its rich accessories, could not but mentally revert to the scanty frugality of his dampery at Chiswick.

"You are anchored in comfortable moorings, Joseph," said he, mournfully, as the heavy cream rolled slowly from its gilt ewer into his steaming cup.

"It may seem so — the world probably thinks so — and even *you*, with a narrow income, may fancy that my position is an enviable one. But when you have seen my father, half-doting, and peevish, and whimsical as he is, you will form a better judgment of all we have to put up with. He is incapable of managing his own affairs, yet jealous of the least interference; he requires the sacrifice of our whole time, yet is irritated by conversation, and will not hear of a visiter so much as dining in the house. He does not spend the eighth of his income, yet he is always on the imaginary verge of pauperism — always fancying he shall be ruined! — and so he *would*, if Sophia and I did not keep an eye on the establishment. The

Heddeston servants are quite enough to waste the whole estate; he has been ruled by them these fifty years, and it really requires a third power in the state to see justice done to all parties. Now, as my father does not choose to have *you*, Charles, it is just as well that he should have *us*. I have the interests of the whole family far more at heart, you know, than a stranger."

"Very true; and in some points of view, it certainly *is* a sacrifice on your part. The rectory is a lovely spot, and you might keep your hunters there, and do as you liked; and I suppose my father maintains his old antipathy to Lord Carmychael and the hounds."

"Worse than ever; he allows me nothing but a shooting pony, and grudges me that."

"By Jove! I could not stand a privation on that score! Were I rector of Heddeston with — what shall I say? — fifteen hundred a year — I would not give up the enjoyment of the field, and the credit of having a good horse in my stable, no! not for the advantage of living here at rack and manger!"

"My dear Charles! you miscalculate strangely. Fifteen hundred a year, did you say? The first year I scarcely made up thirteen; and even last year the balance of my tithe-book and glebe did not stretch beyond fourteen hundred and seventy-five! Believe me, you miscalculate strangely! As to living here at Heddeston, I have solely my ultimate interest in view. As I often observe to Sophia, the entail is so strict, that *I* can only hope to benefit by the personalty; so you see it becomes my business to watch over the economy of the house, and keep an eye to the accruing funds of the estate."

"Humph!" growled poor Charles, between the pauses of his buttered roll. "I perceive that *my* intervention is considered altogether superfluous in the family."

"Why, to say the truth, I could wish that you had postponed your journey, were it only for a week or so. When my father read in the Kentish Chronicle an account of the birth of your last girl, he was in such a towering passion, that — as I observed to Sophia at the time — I

think he would have gone any lengths to bribe you to cut off the entail; and — and ——"

"Place you, Joseph, in my shoes."

"Why not exactly — that is, not immediately; — but, perhaps, eventually dispose of the property where there was the most promising succession of heirs-male."

"Humph!" reiterated Charles Willingham, pushing away his plate with a gesture of despair.

"You see he had fixed his sanguine expectation on *my* having a son; and about a fortnight ago, when Sophia presented me with a little girl ——"

"A little girl! aha! ——"

"He grew more peevish and indignant than ever. He has scarcely had half an hour's accession of good humour since that time; and I verily believe that were there a young lady in the country fool enough to have him, Sir Claude would marry again, for the sole pleasure of spiting us both!"

"*Fool* enough!" again reiterated Charles, with his thoughts reverted to his own experience of the interested selfishness of womankind. "As if there were not abundance of fools to be found in any county of the United Kingdom, ready to jump at a jointure on the Heddeston estates."

"That is just Sophia's remark! and I have profited by the suggestion to decline the proffered visit of two of her own younger sisters, whom her cunning mother was anxious to foist upon us during her confinement. No, no! I was quite up to that manœuvre, thank Heaven!"

"You do not seem to entertain a very flattering opinion of your wife's relations."

"Who does? — one always knows them so much too well! However, to return to Sir Claude; — I really wish, Charles, you had not happened to time your visit so inauspiciously; for your arrival will only revive the remembrance of his mortification, and without benefiting you. He had almost got over his disappointment: he even asked me yesterday after dinner how the baby was getting on, and when Mrs. Joseph would be churched! To be sure he added one of his usual ungracious observations about

the expense of maintaining so many nurses in the house; as if I and Sophia would keep a supernumerary servant one day longer than was necessary."

"Mr. Joseph," said the rubicund butler, slowly intruding his portly person into the breakfast-room, "my master has asked for you twice. He has taken his chocolate and half a square of dry toast, and complains of being very bilious."

"Well, well, never mind, Dickinson. Dr. Dodderwell will be here at two; and between the newspaper and the weather — the glass and the almanack — we shall get him on very well till then. Did you propose an Abernethy biscuit?"

"Sir Claude took five or six, sir, before he was up."

"Humph," again exclaimed Charles Willingham, "*bilious!* — poor old man."

"I will go and acquaint him with your arrival," said the rector of Heddeston, rising deliberately from the discussion of a final cutlet. "For since you *are* come, he *must* know it; and the sooner we ascertain the effects of the shock, the better. I quite tremble for poor Sophia's feelings on the occasion; her maternal solicitudes will naturally point out the very serious disadvantage your visit may prove to our poor little destitute girl."

"*And mine!*" ejaculated Charles. But Mr. Joseph had already departed on his pious errand; and Dickinson, the roseate butler, alone remained in audience of his pathetic apostrophe.

"Ah! Master Charles!" responded the old man, with a sympathetic wheeze, and a prolonged vibration of his powdered head.

It was a shake which, like Lord Burghleigh's, was destined to supersede a world of eloquence; and Mr. Willingham interpreted, from the gesture, a thousand unutterable things. "Dickinson!" said he, "times are sadly altered at the Court."

CHAPTER II.

Un homme partial est exposé à de petites mortifications; car, comme il est egalement impossible que ceux qu'il favorise soient toujours heureux, et que ceux contre qui il se déclare, soient toujours en faute, ou malheureux, il nait de là qu'il lui arrive souvent de perdre contenance ou par le mauvais succès de ses amis, ou par la gloire de ceux qu'il n'aime point. LA BRUYERE.

"JOSEPH, pray take your feet off the fender," said poor peevish Sir Claude, as they were all three sitting together on the following evening, "you fidget me to death."

The submissive Joseph obeyed.

"And pray don't balance your chair in that tiresome manner, you are enough to give one a nervous fever."

Again Joseph was obedient; and Charles Willingham began to think that the dampery at Chiswick, with its freedom of action, was in truth preferable to the splendid slavery of Heddeston Court.

"Has any one been down to the lodge? Are the evening papers come yet?"

"No, sir."

"I really think the Highflyer grows slower and slower every day. Don't they talk of starting a new coach?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ay, ay! but it will be some time before the old county families bestow their patronage upon an upstart city speculation."

"Very true, sir."

"And pray, sir, why do you suppose that we are greater fools than the rest of the world?"

"I, sir?—I suppose nothing."

"No, truly," muttered Sir Claude; "between indolence and caution, there is no pumping an opinion out of you. An't you going to visit your lady this evening, Joseph?"

"I was just thinking of moving, sir; and as it is late, perhaps you will allow me to see you up to bed first."

"By no means. Your brother Charles's company enlivens me. I have got a great deal to ask him about what has been going on in town this session, and you may

profit by the opportunity to amuse yourself with the squalling of your bantling — your *young lady!* — the first that has graced, or disgraced, poor Heddeston Court these fifty years. Thank God, I never cursed myself with any thing but *sons*."

"You were in luck, sir," said Charles, attempting to laugh away his brother's embarrassment, and to conceal his own vexation.

"There — there — good night, Joe," resumed Sir Claude, fretfully. "Take care to turn the handle of the door, instead of slamming it; and pray don't stalk along the passages over-head, as if you were ascertaining the stability of the rafters."

"No, sir, no!" said Joseph, with humiliated forbearance; and as he left the room he cast a resentful look upon his brother, as being both the witness and the cause of all this extraordinary irritation.

Charles Willingham had never at any period of his life been a favourite with his father. Sir Claude was a jealous, narrow-minded man, who had been equally disgusted by the popularity and by the liberal expenditure of his heir. That he *was* his heir, indeed, was a sufficient motive for distrust; he looked upon the deed of entail which secured his son's inheritance as an injurious act committed by his ancestors in favour of his posterity. Joseph was the object of his bounty — the martyr of his caprices; but, as to Charles, the only way in which he could exert a paternal authority over *him*, was by rendering the period of his own life a period of penance to his son; he knew that he had no *post obit* powers of tyrannical oppression.

And then his wilful marriage had proved a fresh stumbling-block of offence in the path of this peremptory parent. Sir Claude Willingham was a proud man, and was anxious that his successors should form suitable alliances; but not by connecting themselves with a degree of rank superior to his own — he was extremely tenacious of his supremacy in his clan. At the time when the maritime provinces of the south were infected with the invasion fever, with all its malignant symptoms of fencibles and volunteers, the Heddeston yeomanry corps had well

nigh brought down the honours of the peerage upon its founder and commandant; and in that case, Sir Claude would have made no objection to the union of either of his sons with a nobleman's daughter—provided always that the nobleman were a baron, and dating from no very ancient creation:—any reference to Magna Charta or Domesday-book would have been sufficient to forbid the banns.

But Lady Maria de Vesci was descended from a whole dynasty of antediluvian earls; she must necessarily be proud; she was confessedly poor: and the measure of Sir Claude's antipathies rose beyond all just bounds. He, therefore, avenged his sense of domestic injury on occasion of Charles's filial rebellion, by increased affection and redoubled liberality towards Joseph. He installed him in the family living, domesticated him under his own roof; and offered but a very transient and trifling opposition to an alliance which would have revolted him at any other time by its plebeian associations.

"You see, sir," observed Joseph, after having cautiously revealed his long and secret engagements with Miss Sophia Bodham, "a clergyman should neither expect nor desire to form a very brilliant connection; he must look to the comforts and respectability of his future home: fine ladies make but a sorry figure at the head of an economical glebe-house establishment. Now Sophia is an excellent manager—has been accustomed all her life to clerical habits; and the fortune she does not *bring* me, she will save by her prudence."

"Of two bad choices, Joe, I own you have made the best: this affair does not vex me half so much as Charles's cursed folly. *Two* Lady Marias in the family would have been the death of me at once."

"I am persuaded, sir, you will be enchanted with my Sophia!—such a modest sense of her own inferiority, and of her strange good fortune in matching into the Willingham family!"

"The daughter of a country parson—of a schoolmaster—may well be proud of such an alliance."

"Not exactly a *schoolmaster*, sir;—a respectable cler-

gyman, preparing a few young men of condition for college, can scarcely be called a schoolmaster!"

"There is only a bunch of birch to choose between the two—no mighty distinction!"

"So excellent a housekeeper as Sophia, I suppose, never existed. You have often heard me speak of the bread at Ilverstone; the second course at the parsonage was positively equal to Mrs. Frangipane's; and Sophia, to my certain knowledge, presided over every thing. We never sat down to dinner that her mother did not mention it!"

"I wonder what Lady Maria knows of the mysteries of the oven!" exclaimed Sir Claude, feebly chafing his wasted hands with an air of triumph; although he secretly despised all these details, and would, under any other circumstances, have seen through and resented the whole plot.

"Oh, you must be well aware, sir, that *I* have no pretensions to consort with lords and ladies; the respectability of my own family-connections is sufficient for *me*. Where the estates are bound by an entail so strict as ours, a younger brother, who incurs the risk of a numerous offspring by an early marriage, is bound to consult their interest by selecting a mother who has been carefully and frugally educated."

A numerous offspring! — new projects unfolded themselves to the imagination of Sir Claude at the mere sound! Lady Maria had already produced a daughter, and might yield no future heir male to the property; while Mrs. Joseph would probably enable him to baffle the hopes of his own prodigal son: Mrs. Joseph would probably prove a Hecuba, and supply the Heddeston entail with a score or two of young Trojans. On this hint he spoke his sentence of paternal approval; and within a few weeks, the young couple were united by his cordial sanction, and settled irrevocably at the Court. It was said in the county, that he was a most placable and liberal father. So much, again, for the opinion of the world!

During many months the establishment flourished surprisingly under the new administration; Sir Claude had never thought the Heddeston poultry so fat, the Heddeston

cheeses so rich, nor the Heddeston apricots so transparently clarified, as since Mrs. Joseph's accession to the throne of domestic management. She was indefatigable in wiping his spectacles, reading the newspapers, chiding the retardment of the Highflyer, and ringing the bell for Dr. Dodderwell's horse on the conclusion of his daily visit to the valetudinarian of the Court. Sir Claude observed to every successive visiter that his daughter-in law was a most superior young woman; and as Lady Maria's second child had proved to be another daughter, the prospects of Sophia's promised increase to the family soon afforded the engrossing interest of his selfish and fractious existence. But when Miss Willingham the third was announced to her ungracious grandsire, the *prestige* formed by his anticipations vanished in a moment. He now began to despise Mrs. Joseph as cordially as he had ever detested Lady Maria; she had been the instrument of disappointing his malice; — she had been the means of proving him in the wrong.

"Well, Charles, and what do you think of your brother's wife?" demanded the old man, with a sneer, when due time had been accorded for the stealthy progress of Joseph's footsteps above. "I think you visited her this morning?"

"I did, sir; and your previous information concerning her had been so unfavourable, that I was rather agreeably disappointed."

"Humph! Why you don't mean to tell me that you did not find her deucedly ugly?"

"Youth is a veil that covers so many defects!"

"Ay, and worse than ugly — mean-looking, contracted; an upstart in every feature, every gesture, every tone! — I hate a vulgar voice."

"So do I, sir; but Mrs. Joseph employed hers in the utterance of so many kind expressions concerning my brother and his whole family, that ——"

"A mere hypocrite — a very crocodile!"

"That I had no leisure to think of any thing but his good fortune in having secured so acquiescent and domestic a companion," continued Charles; who, for his brother's

sake, was willing to give the most favourable character to his opinions. His feelings had been, in fact, considerably mollified towards Joseph by the spectacle of his humiliating and uneasy position in his father's house; his own nature, too, was so amiable and conciliatory — he had been so much touched by the art with which his sister-in-law had exhibited her baby, and her maternal affections to captivate the young father, parted for the first time since his marriage from his own home and his own chileren — that he was very sincere in his admiration of the discretion of Joseph's choice. He could not but contrast it with his personal predicament; he could not but compare Sophia's caudle-cup sensibility with the callous and unmotherly fine ladyism of Lady Maria. Sir Claude's ill-nature, however, was not to be so silenced.

"Acquiescent and domestic, truly! Why, I suppose you know who she was? — I suppose you know that your brother brought his bride home to Heddeston Court with her plebeian fingers covered with the paste of the dumplings she had been kneading all her life?"

"I have a great respect for dumplings and their artificers, sir," said Charles, laughing; "a narrow income makes a man acquainted with strange fare."

"Charles," replied his father, solemnly, without noticing this running commentary, "if ever you should have a son — which I begin to doubt — never send him to a lonely parsonage in a marshy country, where there are four cunning unmarried daughters, open-mouthed, to decoy his boyhood into a premature engagement. What signifies any scholarship he may possibly acquire, compared with the low-born, low-bred wife with which he is *sure* to hamper himself?"

"*My* son (I acknowledge with you, sir, that he begins to appear a very apochryphal personage) will probably inherit his father's predilections; and had you sent *me* parsonaging into the marshes instead of Joseph, I should have been far more likely to return to Heddeston with an ague, caught in snipe-shooting, than with a vulgar wife caught in ——"

"Aha! the truth is out then; you *do* think her vul-

gar!" interrupted the old man with glee, spitefully chafing his lean hands. "Pray now, Charles, is Lady Maria dark or fair, tall or short? When I expressed my original disapprobation of your marriage with a poor nobleman's daughter, I certainly had not dreamt of your brother's matching with a poor clergyman's."

This was the first enquiry Sir Claude had ever hazarded touching his aristocratic daughter-in-law, and the opening appeared to her husband highly propitious. "Maria is a remarkably graceful, elegant woman, sir, without being strictly beautiful. She has great refinement of mind, and a degree of judgment highly valuable to a hair-brained scape-grace like myself. I can accuse her but of one failing, my dear father — that of sharing *your* unkind antipathy to little girls. She was deeply concerned by the birth of a second daughter."

"Was she, by Jove?" exclaimed Sir Claude, brightening; "I'm glad to hear it — *very* glad to hear it. Well, well! she must come down to Heddeston, and freshen herself up with Kentish fare and Kentish breezes, eh, Charles? Ay! and she can bring the *girls* — the *two* girls — with her. I suppose they will not look uglier, or squall louder, than Mrs. Joseph's?"

"Little Claudia, sir, is a perfect beauty; and ——"

"You have named your eldest after me, eh?"

"I took that liberty without troubling you by a probably unwelcome request for your sanction; and Eleanor, the baby ——"

"Well, don't let me hear any more about them. Go back to town to-morrow, Charles, and bring them down with you as soon as you can. I suppose you have a carriage. I suppose that, had you been limited to *one* hundred a-year, a Lady Maria would have required an equipage?"

"Lady de Vesci's was bequeathed to us by her will; but poor Maria found the common comforts of life so much beyond our reach, that she insisted upon having it sold, as well as some family jewels, which were far more precious to her. But the sacrifice was made to pay *my* debts, and she has never appeared to lament it."

Sir Claude, who was little aware that this latter part of the statement was a very amiable and palliative view of the fact on the part of his hen-pecked son, was prodigiously ashamed. "Then you had better take up the carriage with you; *my* daughter-in-law must not be seen in a hack chaise. You did wrong to part with your wife's property, Charles; you should have applied to me for assistance."

"If you remember, sir, the Christmas before last ——"

"Pshaw!—pshaw! what is the use of reverting to old grievances? All that is over now, and had better be forgotten. You must prepare Lady Maria to overlook the past, and to enjoy her visit to Heddeston."

"It is an event to which she has looked as an unattainable pleasure."

"At all events," said old Willingham, pursuing the train of his own reflections, "*her* faults will be those of a gentlewoman. Now you have no conception of the low, vulgar structure of Mrs. Joseph's mind! For the first six months of her residence here, she used to harass me to death with her eternal details of the peculations of my servants. She spoke so plausibly, that she even persuaded me to institute a stable-allowance for my horses; and I wish you had seen the old set of bays at the end of two months! It cost me twice the money saved, in farrier's bills, and beans, to make up for lost time! You must have observed yourself, a thousand paltry alterations in the minutiæ of the household. I trust you did not attribute them to *me?*"

"I hardly imagined, sir, that my brother and his wife would presume to act without your sanction."

Sir Claude was ashamed to confess to his elder son how thoroughly he had been cajoled into delegating his authority into their hands. "Now just look at this cursed grate," said he, taking up the poker, by way of cover to his own confusion. "Rumfordized! you see — Rumfordized to the standard of her own parsonage experience! As if a handful of coals could be coaxed into giving out the genial warmth of a full, glowing mass of ignited matter! — and at Heddeston, too, where the woods are groaning to be cut down. By Jove! I don't wonder that this

chafing-dish of cinders sometimes provokes Joseph to put his long thin legs upon the fender. Till that woman was shut up in her own room, I was wholly unsuspicious of the innovations she had introduced among my old servants. But their complaints have reached me now: I have found her out; and as soon as she gets down stairs and about again, I shall take care to let her know, that if she cannot repress her ardour for minor domestic reformation, she must practise it at Heddeston Rectory, and not at Heddeston Court. I do not intend *either* of my sons' wives to regulate my establishment."

Charles Willingham, who, as I have before observed, was considerably brightened in his perceptions by the constant companionship of Lady Maria, was wise enough to discover that this rapid change of feeling, and explosion of displeasure towards Mrs. Joseph, arose solely from the sex of her recent offspring; and, therefore, exulted very moderately over the prospects it afforded to himself. The object of his visit, however, was already more than attained; and he was more deeply touched by his father's kindness, more gratified by his invitation to his family, than its real motives deserved. He listened with respect to the old and well-known effusions of Protestant loyalty with which Sir Claude could not refrain from closing the evening; and on Dickinson's arrival with the ten o'clock tray, he patiently sympathised with his father's long-established murmurs against the inconsistency of his gruel, and the tenuity of his dry toast.

On the following evening, the scene was duly recounted and re-recounted by the fire-side of the dampery at Chiswick; and it was with a sentiment of the most elated surprise that Lady Maria found herself, and her paraphernalia of daughters, nurses, and bandboxes, rolling through the county of Kent, in a carriage bearing the emblazonments of the family of the Willinghams towards its ancient inheritance. She had already pre-determined that it should be long enough before the horses' heads were turned, with the same burden, in an opposite direction. She had very little intention of ever finding her way back to Chiswick.

CHAPTER III.

When Greek meets Greek—then comes the tug of war.
SHAKSPEARE.

THREE days had necessarily elapsed between the departure of Charles Willingham from his father's mansion, and the arrival of Lady Maria and her children among the men of Kent; and three days afford a sufficient period for wonderful manœuvres to an active commander of the forces. Mrs. Joseph, under the excitement of her opponent's advance towards the field of action, had defied both doctor and nurse, ancient axiom and modern experience, and, armed in a panoply of flannels, had made Sir Claude's tea, and shared his dry toast and gruel in his own particular parlour, on two successive evenings.

"Salt seasons dainties," sings Lord Byron; "Tea seasons scandal," sings the wooden cuckoo of every maiden coterie; and it was miraculous with how abundant a proportion of envenomed breath Mrs. Joseph contrived to accompany the preliminary two cups, and supplementary "small half quarter of a dish," which formed the nightly stint of Sir Claude. She did more than "hint a fault and hesitate dislike," towards her coming sister-in-law. She boldly affirmed that *poor Charles* was sadly changed since his marriage; that his brother, in their private conversations, had found him dreadfully low; that it was to be hoped Lady Maria might be induced to alter her mode of conduct towards her husband and innocent babes during their visit to Heddeston; but that really after her ingratitude in deserting the aged and infirm parent, who had proved so affectionate a mother to her, for the sake of a dissipated young man, with whom she had been only a few weeks acquainted, it would be absurd to expect much, either from her feelings or her principles. No! it was very plain that Lady Maria had *no heart!* Mrs. Joseph believed, indeed, that family affection was no longer in vogue among the circles of *high life!*

Now Sir Claude, although he dested the traces of *low life* manifest in herself, and was somewhat on his guard against the interested motives prompting her malicious insinuations, could not, from habit, divest himself of a certain degree of faith in her gossiping narratives. At all events, the favourable picture traced by his elder son of his wife and home faded under the disparaging light thus thrown upon its obscurities: the whole day on which Lady Maria was expected at the Court was passed in the most feverish restlessness; in wandering from chamber to chamber in fretful inspection of their preparations; which, through the officious interposition of Mrs. Joseph, were rendered as expensive and as troublesome to every member of the extensive household as the utmost refinement of ill nature could instigate. Perhaps she desired to extend, to their latest limit, those privileges of domestic supremacy which her presentiments assured her were rapidly verging towards abrogation. Meantime poor Sir Claude, in spite of an extraordinary indulgence in antispasmodic tinctures, and an extra spoonful of white mustard-seed, was as nervous and unhappy as heart could wish: — already he repented of his superfluous complaisance towards his eldest son's family, as bitterly as though it were not among the first instances of good-nature which he had exercised during the sixty-eight years and a half of his mortal existence!

But Mrs. Joseph little knew with whom she had to deal! As well might she have attempted to "drink up Eisel — eat a crocodile," as cope with the profound finesse of Lady Maria. Hers was the mere raw material — the mere brute quality of *cunning;* but Lady Maria was endowed with the same natural qualifications, polished into *tact* by an early encounter with the friction of the world. For nine-and-twenty years she had been a spectator or actor in the intrigues of society at large; for nine-and-twenty years she had been dexterously administering to the weaknesses and vices of others, and for a considerable portion of that time she had been busied in managing her mother, who made up in obstinacy and perverseness what she wanted in ntellect and the power of self-governance. She had already decided that Sir Claude would form by comparison a

docile victim: to hamper *him* with bit and bridle would be mere play-work; and as to Mrs. Joseph herself, she felt that it would be a waste of tactics to employ any thing but the most straightforward measures, in discomfiting and discountenancing the obscure daughter of a web-footed dominie, whether M. A. or B. A. or LL. D. — Mrs. Joseph, indeed! — Lady Maria scarcely condescended to think of her as a rival. Like Napoleon, she had already prematurely prepared the bulletin, proclaiming her sister-in-law's "total defeat, with an immense loss."

But the carriage was scarcely disencumbered of its multitudinous imperials, and she had not listened fifteen minutes to Sir Claude's minute catechisation concerning the state of the roads, and the promptitude of attendance ensured by the sight of the Willingham equipage, throughout all the varieties of White Lions and Blue Boars between Camberwell and Heddeston, before she found occasion to alter her opinion. There is a sort of freemasonry among the artful, revealing them to each other at first sight. Like the Cartouche and Mandrin of the French Vaudeville, who mutually disencumber their pockets of watch and purse during an introductory dialogue, the sisters instantly recognised the masterly adroitness visible in the efforts of each; and Lady Maria was really delighted by the discovery. She was something of an amateur in her vocation; and her hand had been so long out — to employ finesse in her intercourse with Charles would have been so like advancing *en échelon* to attack an undefended stone wall — that she quite congratulated herself upon her future prospects of finding occasion to rub the rust from her obsolete weapons of offence and defence. As to the reverend Joseph himself, it was astonishing how quickly and how completely her dislike subsided into contempt. A man whose loquacity prompted him to place his plan of attack in the hands of a rival general was despicable indeed!

Mrs. Joseph Willingham had sufficient discernment to be perfectly aware of the superiority of her opponent's strength in the contest; but the mere apprehension of defeat, by depriving her of her presence of mind, soon threw all her manœuvres into confusion, and effectually exposed

her weak points to the enemy. Deeming any thing like defiance, or even bold defence, to be unavailing, she affected a new mode of interesting the sympathy of Sir Claude. She assumed the modesty of conscious insignificance, and attempted to become "poor dear Mrs. Joseph." This was a dead failure! While she toiled and tugged, sighed, talked, and insinuated, Lady Maria defeated her labours by the well-maintained semblance of perfect unconsciousness; like a snake she glided, with noiseless gesture, hither and thither — piercing every auger-hole she wished to penetrate. No sooner did she find her sister-in-law take refuge in an amiable humility, than she elevated her own head with graceful dignity, and overlooked her altogether; — sending her to Coventry with the most courteous and urbane indifference.

Possessed of none but the common-place principles of her heart, Mrs. Joseph meanwhile continued to employ them as the forlorn hope of her ambition. She persisted in addressing her flagrant adulation to Sir Claude, unconscious that, although he had been contented to swallow its flattery while no spectator stood by to satirise the meanness of both, he was by no means anxious to betray his corrupt appetite to his new inmate. She had instructed her nurse to angle for his favour with the usual grandfather's bait — the marvellous likeness of her jaundiced infant to himself; and to contrive that its daily walks should cross *his* daily airings, and its ascent and descent of the great stairs coincide with his own periodical hours of rising and setting. But it had never occurred to her plebeian taste to feminise the Christian appellation of the touchy baronet; and while she became fidgeted to agonies by his frequent enquiries after little Claudia, she was amazed by the rigid tenacity with which Lady Maria persisted in secluding her children from his observation. On her first arrival she had prudently selected for their use the hereditary nursery of the house; which, as is usually the case in respectable old family mansions, was elevated beyond all risk of intruding its clamours on the rest of the family; and was undisturbed itself by aught save the

cawing of rooks on the chimney tops, or the eaves' dropping companionship of the swifts and swallows.

The two unwelcome Miss Willinghams, therefore, were neither seen, nor heard of, nor thought of, in the family. Lady Maria had the sense to resist all the old man's courteous overtures for their appearance in the drawing-room; and no sooner did he commence his daily enquiries concerning "poor little Claudia," than she immediately led him to incidentalise on his own "life and times," by some adroit allusion to Lord North's administration (the epoch of his maiden speech); or by some enquiry touching the beauty of Lady Sarah Bunbury, who was the cousin and court-rival of his first love. She possessed a divining rod, at whose touch the rock-spring of his latent eloquence failed not to burst forth; and a mental stop-watch, by which she could exactly ascertain and limit the duration of its flow.

Now of Lord North and Lady Sarah Mrs. Joseph was wholly innocent; nor did the experience of her marsh seclusion suggest a single question by which she could mark an assumed interest in the topic, or prolong the debate. Besides, Lady Maria possessed another vantage ground of unquestionable supremacy. Constitutionally trained from her earliest youth by the thermometer of a dowager's temperament, she could not only preserve an unheightened complexion amidst the feverish excitements of the atmosphere of Sir Claude's valetudinarian parlour, but could actually luxuriate in the breathlessness of his hermetically-sealed chariot; — an enclosure which Mrs. Joseph, whose experience was limited to the parsonic modesty of a gig, never encountered without peril of epilepsy. *Her* Galenic maxims, too, were culled from the exploded pages of Buchan, while those of Lady Maria recorded the *vivâ voce* wisdom of Sir Walter Farquhar and Dr. Baillie; and could run through an extempore scale of fashionable nostrums, including every "anti" that ever enriched the stamp-office, or the columns of the Morning Post.

Sir Claude Willingham became insensibly entranced by the influence of all these domestic accomplishments. Weeks passed away like days, and months like weeks; and al-

though Lady Maria refrained not from periodical allusions to the charms of Chiswick, to the cording of trunks, and the epistolary importunities of her London friends and relatives for their return, she was delighted to perceive that the old gentleman was obstinately pre-determined against sanctioning their further domiciliation at the dampery. No sooner had she satisfied herself that her society was vitally important to his comfort, than she resolved to retain an absentee tenure upon that much-abhorred dwelling as an admonitory rod to be held, *in terrorem*, over the head of her father-in-law; and the very name of Chiswick became converted into a sort of spur wherewith to rouse his flagging affections.

With the valetocracy of Heddeston Court, in the mean time, Lady Maria entertained a tacit alliance, after the fashion of the unjust steward: giving them no personal trouble, and graciously overlooking peculation and peccadilloes wherever they confronted her eye. Moreover, she possessed over Mrs. Joseph, in the estimation of the ancient servants of the house, the superlative charm of patrician rank; she was not only the wife of the heir apparent of all its honours, but, by birthright, herself a ladyship! If pride were banished from the earth, it would be found safely sheltered in the steward's room of some family mansion! — the last temple dedicated to its altars.

The neighbours, too, were all on the eldest or *inheriting* side of the question: the grandiosities, from a dread of plebeian intrusion into their mystic circle; and the mediocrities, from a jealousy of seeing Mrs. Joseph promoted over their own heads.

"It must be a great bore to poor Lady Maria Willingham, who has always been accustomed to such good society, to find herself forced into association with that vulgar schoolmaster's daughter," said Lady Monteagle to her own four tall spinsters, each and all of whom had formerly attempted, without success, to undermine the fidelity of the staunch Joseph towards his heroine of the marshes.

"It must, indeed, mamma," replied Miss Marian, the eldest of the maiden squadron. "A younger brother's wife, too, to set herself up as an authority — and such an

authority! She had actually contrived to persuade that poor silly old man to shut himself up in his forlorn dungeon, and convert himself into a recluse! However, since Lady Maria's arrival, things have found their way back into their old channel. We have dined at Heddeston four or five times since Christmas; and although one seldom meets any one there but the old humdrum county set — people one knows by heart in all their sameness of dress, equipage, and opinions — still it is better than having the house of our nearest neighbour barred up, like the County Lunatic Asylum."

"True, my dear; and although, as you wisely observe, we never meet any thing new there — any thing *available*" — she looked significantly at her four unmarried daughters — "yet the house is a very good resource whenever we have a party staying with us. Heddeston Court, and a luncheon, form an excellent object for a ride, when your brother and his college friends are here. It looks suspicious, you know, to keep young men sauntering about the shrubberies, or lounging in the music-room all the morning; and it is far more agreeable, and more useful too, to find the honours done by a woman of the world, like Lady Maria, than by such a prim, underbred, overbred, ceremonious personage as that Mrs. Joseph."

"To be sure it is," exclaimed Margaret, the youngest of the quartette. "She might have done very well to preside over the baked meats of the smoky vicarage parlour; but I never saw any one more miserably misplaced than she used to look in that grand old hall, among the family plate and family pictures. It was entirely Mrs. Joseph, by the by, who put a stop to our project of a bow-meeting in Heddeston Vale."

"Yes, Margaret," rejoined her sister; "and don't you remember when she planted Lord Stapylford next mamma that morning at luncheon? — and having placed you and me together, desired her own stupid bore of a husband to 'take care of the young ladies;' — as if *he* knew how to do any thing but take care of *himself!* Such ignorance of the world! Now, Lady Maria has *so* much tact!"

"I must say," observed Mrs. Darnham, the wife of the

curate of Heddeston, to her mild spouse, "that Lady Maria's arrival at the Court has been a very fortunate event. This is the second haunch we have had this season, besides constant supplies of fruit, and the loan of the pony! Now it would have been long enough before the Joseph Willinghams thought of showing us any such attention. *She* had been so long accustomed to the saving line, that she seemed even to grudge the poor creatures from the village every stick they were allowed to gather in the avenue! As to ourselves, considering who she *was*, and what we *are*, I think it was incumbent on her to be more considerate and more respectful: but fine feathers make fine birds; and since she so successfully employed hers in lining her nest, she has quite forgotten you and me, Darnham!"

"Ay, my dear! and herself too. Now it was only last Sunday three weeks that ——"

"For my part," interrupted Mrs. D., who was far from tolerant of any prolixity but her own, "I do most sincerely hope that Lady Maria will give an heir to the estate, and establish herself at Heddeston Court, if it be only to spite Mrs. Joseph. Her ladyship is so vastly condescending! She lent me the pattern of Miss Claudia's frock last week for my little Milicent; and she seldom comes here without going over the poultry-yard. I have no doubt I shall get a brood of the Heddeston game-bantams before the summer is over; and Mrs. Joseph, you know, refused me, point blank, last year."

I know not whether the destinies were propitiated by the anxieties of Mrs. Darnham, or by the secret invocations of the Lady Maria herself; but before the close of the second year of her settlement in Kent, its County Chronicle announced, with becoming paragraphic honours, that the family tree of Heddeston Court was graced with fresh glory in the birth of a son! and all the preparation, expectation, and exultation which had long awaited the event, fell far short of the universal triumph bestowed on its realisation. The bells of Heddeston Tower were well nigh chimed to powder—the woods of Heddeston Chase were all but reduced to ashes by a mighty conflagration of bonfires! Torrents of ale that might have floated the yacht-

club poured their amber tides through the clamorous village; and its weekly dole was daily repeated between Sabbath and Sabbath for the space of a calendar month. As to Lady Maria, she oppressed her agonised sister-in-law on the occasion with a martyrdom of prosperous condescension; and it was diverting to observe the spasmodic twist of countenance which Mrs. Joseph attempted to convert into a congratulatory smile, as she bent over the cradle of an heir apparent, as eagerly coveted as ever was a dauphin of France!

Charles Willingham himself, although of the family far the most interested in the event, rejoiced with becoming moderation in his fortunate paternity. He loved little Claudia and Eleanor, in fact, as well or better than the little fair white mass of human imbecility, displayed by the head nurse as his "princely boy;" and since he had been admitted by his whimsical parent to share in the comforts of his brother's prosperity, he was neither anxious to provoke his envy, nor supersede his expectations. He was good-naturedly fond of Joseph, and selfishly satisfied to ensure his daily companionship in riding, driving, shooting, fishing, and hunting over the estate. So long as Joseph and his wife remained at Heddeston, he did not feel himself a peremptory fixture at his father's tea-table; or compelled to economise with the bailiff, or prose with the steward. Leave him the legislation of the body corporate of gamekeepers, and the persecution and prosecution of all the poachers throughout the property, and Charles cared but little in whose hands the budget of the financial department was deposited by his father.

But of all the personages affected by this important family catastrophe, Sir Claude was at once the most elated and the most actively malicious. It seemed impossible that *he* should forgive Mrs. Joseph for having been the passive means of disappointing the projects he had formed for his favourite son; and in good truth he laboured to drag her cup of bitterness with fourfold wormwood. He insisted upon leaning on her arm in all his visits to the exulting Lady Maria; upon consulting *her* taste in all his presents to his auspicious grandson; and he continually

signified, in her reluctant ears, his intention of making an immediate settlement in favour of the female branches of Lady Maria's offspring. He scarcely knew, he said, in what more flattering manner to mark his esteem and gratitude; and from that hour the little girls were peremptorily withdrawn from their elevated solitude, and promoted from their companionship with the solitary sparrow on the housetop, to that of the stately peacocks spreading their lavish glories among the beautiful lawns of Heddeston Court. Their lady-mother, on her re-descent into the saloon, found Claudia established on grandpapa's knee, and Eleanor busy with his spectacle-case; but she was passive under the innovation. She even began to agree with worthy Mrs. Darnham, that they were the prettiest little girls in the world, and to forgive her husband's predilection in their favour; for they no longer marred the prospects of her ambition!

Meantime poor Mary Willingham, Mrs. Joseph's unlucky babe, remained strictly exiled to her own apartment. Lady Maria, with provoking patronage, insisted that she should share the favour and indulgence lavished upon her own two graceful sprites. But it might not be! the malicious old man willingly tolerated her admittance into their pleasures; while, by his sneers of comparison, he contrived to convert the concession into a chastisement.

Mrs. Joseph's heart had long been bursting with mortification. She saw that her own sun had set for ever at the Court — that her hopes of domestic rule were at an end — that she must confine the future triumphs of her pride to her *own* family; where the parade of having married a baronet's son would still count for something! Poor thing! she was left to the miserable consolation of her precedence over her neighbours, Mesdames Darnham and Pilkington, and of saying spiteful things to Lady Maria whenever occasion offered. Nor, in truth, was her fair sister-in-law slow at a rejoinder: she was far better skilled to envelope her retorts in a provoking display of courtesy; but they were not the less bitter nor the less biting. Whenever this war of words occurred between them — and it was generally after Sir Claude had drowned himself to sleep for the

evening in his easy chair — their respective husbands, like the owners of two angry dogs, were fully occupied in patting them into mutual submission. Occasional growls or snarls from their several retreats would still give tokens of suppressed ill-will; tokens which were as constantly soothed by "Sophia! pray recollect yourself!" or, "Dearest Maria! for *my* sake forbear!" from the appeasing lips of the perplexed brothers. Sophia, indeed, appeared to be the only person towards whom dearest Maria did not deem it necessary, or find it her policy, to assume a show of courtesy. In *her* presence she wore all her failings with undisguised defiance — snapt at her husband, scolded her children, sneered at Sir Claude. She seemed determined to mark her contempt, by an exhibition of her utter indifference concerning Mrs. Joseph's opinion.

So long as the balance of domestic power remained in any degree suspended, this state of things had endured, and might endure; but from the moment that Sir Claude's partiality threw an undue weight into the scale, — from the moment that victory, perched on his little grandson's cradle, decided in favour of Lady Maria, — the conflict was no longer to be borne. A few weeks afterwards, as Charles Willingham and his brother were riding home together from a coursing meeting, Joseph unfolded his intended removal to his rectory. Much did he say of the duties of his profession, which required his stationary residence in the village; but that sort of cant phraseology did not impose upon the kind-hearted Charles, who had long sympathised in his mortification.

"Duties of your profession? And pray why is Darnham a less efficient representative than he was last year? He understands the people and their ways far better than you do; and at a distance of two miles, you are always within reach of a consultation when difficulties arise. No, no! Joseph! you really must not think of leaving my father."

"You do not consider the solemn engagements into which I have entered towards my parishioners. The parish becomes more populous every year; and the farmers are

beginning to hint at something about a third service; at which Darnham very reasonably demurs."

"Well, then—increase his salary; give him the pasturage of the home field, and the right of common he has asked you for so often, and the bargain will easily be made. I have a very good opinion of Darnham. He got that thorn out of Don's foot, which puzzled us all so terribly the first day of pheasant-shooting last year."

"But even were an arrangement effected — and I really *must* consult my own interests first in such a case — I consider it my duty ——"

"Come, come, Joe! — you know as well as I do that all this sudden change of plan arises solely from my father's slights to little Mary and your wife; which, I do assure you, vex me at least as much as yourself. But you know his whimsical temper; and it is just as likely that next week he may take it into his head to banish Nell and Claudia."

"No, brother, no! — not while *you* have a promising boy to become the head of the family. To speak openly, however, it *is* our mutual change of prospects which has influenced me about removing to the Rectory. As long as our chances were equal, my father being as you observe so very whimsical, there was no saying what his partiality might have induced him to do about the entail."

"Humph!" muttered Charles, switching off the head of a tall thistle in the hedge, to the great discomfiture of his favourite mare.

"But now, you know, all *that* is over. My father hates the sight of us; and if we irritate him by outstaying our welcome — why, we may lose our chance of even the personalty, which at present I consider as good as settled on us. He signed his will the day before your arrival."

"Humph!" repeated Charles — sacrificing a second aspiring weed to his resentment of his brother's selfishness.

"Now — as Sophia very sensibly says — if we settle at the Rectory during my father's lifetime, he will be obliged, in common decency, to do something for us in the way of furniture, and plate, and all that; which will cost him little, and be every thing to us: whereas, if we wait until

his death, all the Heddeston property, which is heir-loom——"

"But with your living and allowance, you must make up, even now, three thousand a-year?"

"True! but an increasing family!"

"Well! well! settle it in your own and your wife's way," rejoined Charles Willingham, somewhat nettled, as he turned his remembrances back upon Chiswick's moistened shades. "Be assured, Joseph, that no brotherly affection will be wanting on my part to improve your future situation."

"We think of removing in May; for Sophia will be confined sometime in August."

In May, accordingly, they did remove: in August, Mrs. Joseph presented her husband with a very superfluous son; and poor peevish Sir Claude, in the midst of his exultation at finding his honourable name thus doubly armed against extinction, caught cold in his very first visit of inspection to the Rectory. With the assistance of a physician or two, he contrived to aggravate his disorder into danger; and before Joseph and Sophia had found time to re-elevate their drooping crests, or to form new projects about the entail, a pompous achievement affixed over the entrance of Heddeston Court announced the final defeat of their unreasonable expectations, and the accession of Sir Charles Willingham to his title and estates.

Happy Lady Maria! How gratefully did she attach herself to the active Dr. Dodderwell! How smilingly attire herself in a second suit of filial sables!

CHAPTER IV.

Death having preyed upon the outward parts
Leaves them insensible; his siege is now
Against the mind, the which he pricks and wounds
With many legions of strange fantasies. SHAKSPEARE.

Sir Charles and Lady Maria Willingham had now attained a very elevated point of human prosperity. They

were in the enjoyment of a splendid income and an ancient title: they possessed an almost baronial mansion in the very garden of England; and a house in Grosvenor Place, which might have fairly tasked one of George Robins's florescent advertisements to describe its merits; — Sir Charles had his hunters and a seat in parliament — Lady Maria her opera-box and the family diamonds. The father lavished his tenderness upon two lovely little girls — and the mother wasted her solicitudes upon the future heir of his house. Nor were these manifold advantages derived under ordinary circumstances of inheritance. By the special favour of destiny, the Willinghams had been sentenced to attain their flowery Eden by a briery path; they had been seated in the lavish lap of luxury by the admonitory hand of Penury herself.

It has been said that Providence marks its contempt of prosperity in the personages on whom it showers the gifts of fortune; but this is a vulgar error. Prosperity is too important a medium of human probation to be unwittingly conferred; and Satan, "grown wiser," quoth Pope, "than in the days of Job,"

Tempts more by making rich than making poor!

Sir Charles and Lady Maria, although sinking under the weight of wealth and station, were the most discontented mortals in the world! I question whether their Chiswick murmurs had ever risen to such a clamorous pitch as that which marked their indignation on finding the claim of the Joseph Willinghams to all the Bank stock, consuls, long annuities, India bonds (East and West), canal shares, and tontines, standing in the name of the late Sir Claude — an unimpeachable right! Even Charles, who was a liberal-minded man and a generous brother, confessed that he considered his father's will an infamous document, reflecting equal discredit upon the testator and his legatee.

"Sir Claude must have been well aware of the nature of the entail," he observed to his equally irritated wife. "He was therefore perfectly acquainted with my incapability to make the smallest settlement on my poor girls, or to increase the dower of my wife beyond the paltry pittance assigned

centuries ago to the dowagers of the Willingham family. The rent roll makes a splendid show, to be sure; but in these days of agricultural distress, a rent-roll is a piece of empty pomp, good only to decoy a man into an expenditure beyond his means. Heddeston Court, too, is so wretchedly out of repair, that I must instantly take up money to keep it from falling over our heads; and ——"

"Yes, yes: Joseph, with his views on the personalty, knew better than to let a mason, or a carpenter, or a plumber, come within sight of the house. I was persuaded, Charles, when he insisted so strenuously on that fall of timber last autumn, that your father's will had passed through his hands, and that he was looking to the land-steward's balance."

"Oh, he never made any secret of his expectations; and had he been content to leave me a decent share of ready money, just to grease the wheels of this crazy old machine of an estate and keep us going, I should not have grudged my brother a becoming competence. However, he will find *my* feelings strangely altered towards him now;—if he thinks to play the Great Mogul at Heddeston any longer, he is plaguily mistaken. Terms of decent civility are all I wish to maintain with the Rectory. I dare say, now that I am in parliament, he will be applying for my interest to advance his professional views. So great and so rich a man as Joseph will not care to be addressed as any thing less than *Mr. Dean*."

"Dear Sophia would be a precious article for a bishop's wife! Turning up her ruffles to carve the mutton, as if she were still at the head of her father's academical table! Your parliamentary interest!—when you are literally obliged to maintain it by hiring a house in town at fifty per cent., which the least consideration on your father's part, or moderation on Joseph's, would have enabled you to make your own by a trifling purchase. No, no! Mr. Joseph; *I* shall take care that our terms of civility with the Rectory are as cool as your own conduct."

To do Lady Maria justice, she maintained this declaration with unvarying consistency; but Sir Charles, although he still continued to grumble, could by no

means coax his excellent disposition into any thing like a malicious rancour against his brother. He always contrived to find his way to the Rectory twenty minutes after his arrival at Heddeston; and although, with the terror of his wife before his eyes, he dared not openly convey to little Mary and little Charles any London tokens of their uncle's affection, he took care that the Highflyer should be put in requisition to deposit certain square brown compact paper parcels in their nursery, bearing the auspicious names of Edlin or of Izzard!

In one respect, indeed, he seemed resolved to disappoint his own anticipations: he never permitted Joseph to make an application for his interest with the powers that were; and long before the immortal Nash had withdrawn from the modernised quadrangle of the court the dapper clerk of the works delegated to inspect the progress of its architectural degradation, Archdeacon Willingham had found his way thither on the old shooting pony — for his five thousand a-year had afforded no addition to his stock — to moralise over his brother's profligate expenditure, and thank him for the unsolicited patronage which had already caused the Rectory to be visited with the dignities of the church.

But Lady Maria, although in the undisturbed possession of every luxury and joy of life which might be supposed to mollify the human heart towards its fellow-creatures, was never known to repress a single iota of the detestation she had originally conceived against her sister-in-law: the best of patriots never *hated* so cordially as she did! A very trifling share of magnanimity, however, might have served to moderate her malice; for nature seemed to delight in confirming her triumph over Mrs. Joseph, and success should have secured her indulgence. She saw her own daughters growing up into tall, elegant, accomplished girls, while Mary Willingham expanded into a gawky, ungainly being, bearing singular corroboration, in personal appearance, of her Bodham descent; and the young heir of the Court was not more distinguished by his beauty and graceful demeanour, than was the unhappy Charles of the Rectory by his sneaking air and contracted countenance. The cousins, indeed, were seldom together; but when occa-

sionally brought into comparison, it was "Hyperion to a satyr" in favour of the youthful beauties of the elder branch.

Fortune at length appeared to grow disgusted by the ungracious manner in which her benefits were acknowledged, and to desert the altars on which the incense of gratitude was so scantily offered. Lady Maria, who was exceedingly anxious for the birth of a second boy, became the mother, a year after her husband's accession to his title, to a third girl; and her only consolation under the disappointment was, that at the same time a similar dispensation was inflicted upon the Rectory. In truth, the grand motive for her anxiety to produce a younger son was to preclude the possibility of the rich living of Heddeston descending to Joseph's representatives. She was a thorough Graspall; and, like Napoleon, would scarcely have consented to become King of England, unless she could have been anointed Archbishop of Canterbury at the same time.

Sir Charles was, as usual, provokingly patient under the misfortune. He was satisfied that his new daughter would grow up as lovely and as intelligent as her sisters; and, choosing to fancy that she already bore a remarkable resemblance to her mother, (whom, by a wonderful stretch of the imagination, he firmly believed to be the best of wives,) he resolved that she should be christened *Maria*. The appellation was soon found to be productive of family confusion; and, in defiance of her baptismal rights, the youngest Miss Willingham was very soon endowed with the pet name of *Minnie*.

The next disaster, however, which befell the inmates of Heddeston Court, was of a far more serious nature; for it affected the most amiable member of the family, and the vital source of its united prosperity. Sir Charles, who had not been deterred, by his senatorial honours or by his paternal gravity, from the indulgence of his original predilection for field sports, and "the credit of having a good horse in his stable," became at length a martyr to his passion. In the course of the autumn following the birth of his last daughter, a desperate fall in hunting sent him home senseless on the shoulders of four of his tenants;

and although, for a long time, the Dodderwells of the country, and Sir Henrys from town, simultaneously pronounced his recovery to be impossible, he was reserved for a far more terrible destiny — he became a cripple for life! To a "hunter of the hills," lingering years of sofas and inclined planes, liniments and frictions, vials and decoctions, form but a prolongation of earthly torment!

It was fortunate for the amiable Sir Charles Willingham that the physical injury which produced this fatal effect upon his mortal frame was of a description equally calculated to enfeeble the mind. Extending its influence from the spine to the intellectual organs, his disorder finally reduced him to a state bordering on imbecility; and thus he was spared the bitter mortification of seeing the adulatory attentions of his beloved Maria transferred to his son and heir; and the affections of his favourite girls bestowed upon that more efficient parent, who had become the sole arbiter of their pleasures and indulgences. But his powers of observation were materially weakened, and his taste for conversation of a rational kind so much impaired, that — provided little Minnie were left to spread her playthings beside his couch — he gave but trifling heed to the negligence of the rest of his family. It was a melancholy spectacle to look upon a man in the prime of life thus miserably reduced; and the more so, because, in spite of his excellent qualities and attaching character, the selfishness of his nearest relatives rendered them disgracefully indifferent about the matter. Every thing at Heddeston Court went on as before: the same parties were invited, the same enjoyments prevailed. Lady Maria alternately audited the accounts, and presided over the festivities of the scene: — it was a bad example to show her son and heir; a detestable school to open to her daughters!

One of the few persons who cared to loiter in the abandoned chamber of the gentle invalid was Joseph Willingham's awkward son, who could not bring himself to forget the former kindness and encouragement he had received from his uncle; and which he now requited with such tokens of gratitude as a boy might offer — with patient society, fruit and flowers from his own garden, and a ready

ministry to the whims and fancies of the motionless sufferer. Poor Sir Charles would lay his hand upon the urchin's sandy head with a vague consciousness of pleasure in his presence; and, next to little Minnie, it is probable that he loved him better than any thing in the world.

The young Claude, meanwhile, in all the intemperance of his youthful spirits, was destined to become aware, in a most irksome degree, of his rising importance in the family. The most eminent medical counsellors of the metropolis had decided that Sir Charles would remain for many years secure in his present state of semi-existence; during which period, Lady Maria, as guardian to the interests of her son, was fully justified in assuming the helm of state. She was well aware, however, that, should any disaster interpose to deprive the family tree of this flourishing branch, the archdeacon — I beg his pardon, he was now a dean — would naturally assume the vigilance and authority of an heir presumptive; and Lady Maria, partial as she was, had never properly appreciated the value of her son, until such a contingency occurred to her mind.

From that hour the boy was doomed to a life of misery and privation. He might not ride, he might not bathe, he might not swing, he might not eat, he might not drink, save according to his mother's vigilant sanction; and inheriting all his unlucky father's active propensities, these restrictions became insupportable. According to Lady Maria's nervous admonitions, waters were only made to drown, the earth to dislocate, the air to refrigerate into hopeless catarrhs. Food was a source of indigestion, sleep of apoplexy: there was no safety, save in universal self-denial and self-seclusion; and "all the ills that flesh is heir to" appeared, by her account, to concentrate their hostility against an eldest and an only son!—

> The grave did gape
> For him thrice wider than for other men.

His worthy uncle, the Dean, compassionating her maternal solicitude, or perhaps anxious to propitiate the future head of his house, was moved to an extraordinary exertion

of generosity in favour of poor Claude. He actually bestowed upon him the old original shooting pony, which, in its foalhood, eighteen years before, had been appropriated by his father to his own use. "It was the steadiest old creature in the world."

Lady Monteagle, who was now—thanks to her daughter Margaret, and to Lady Maria's friendly intervention in her cause—the grandmother of a young Stapylford, and consequently somewhat versed in boyish sports and boyish perils—forewarned her amiable neighbour that the beast was lame, and that a stumbling pony was as dangerous as a restive horse. Mrs. Darnham even suggested that the very reverend had his own ultimate views in the donation. But, in fact, Joseph Willingham, with his usual explicit candour, had announced the "whole truth and nothing but the truth." "The pony," said he, "is no longer strong enough to carry *me*. I do not wish my son to contract a taste for the stable—and it is therefore useless at the Rectory. Now at Heddeston Court, my dear Lady Maria, it will have the run of the park, and cost you little or nothing. And when it is too old for any thing else, why it will do to carry sand for the gardener."

King William the First, and King William the Third, of English history, are recorded to have been severally victims to stumbling horses; but another fate was reserved for young Claude Willingham. His mother's injudicious mode of training had not only redoubled his ardour for all the perilous sports of boyhood, but had debarred him from that very experience which might have diminished their dangers. He was no less sanguine than imprudent, and as unskilled as his very sisters could have been to enjoy the emancipation of a public school; and although by nature a vigorous, manly boy, he unfortunately became the victim of foolish maternal terrors! Before he had been two months at Eton, an accident in a boating party consigned him to a watery grave!—for Lady Maria had never been prevailed on to sanction his learning to swim!

Poor woman! Her heart was profoundly touched by this first chastisement of her pride! Independently of his heirship, she loved her son more than she had ever been

tempted to love any breathing mortal but herself; and even old Lady Monteagle, could she have witnessed her first burst of maternal agony on the arrival of the fatal express, would have refrained from the selfish folly with which she exulted in her own superior wisdom, and in the frequent warnings she had bestowed upon her neighbour's injudicious precautions. "She always saw me give young Stapylford the run of the gamekeeper's lodges, and the command of my stable; but Lady Maria would take neither example nor advice."

Sir Charles appeared, at first, to be spared the worst consciousness of the loss he had sustained; for he listened to its announcement with that vague smile of imbecility, so awful on the countenance of a strong man in the prime of life. But when little Minnie came weeping to his arms in her black weeds, and when he saw himself surrounded by his accustomed attendants in their sable vesture, he gave a piteous half-infantine shriek, which seemed to mark a sudden sensibility to the event. He asked no questions, however, and uttered no further lamentations. But he never held up his miserable head again; and within a month after the untimely death of his son, he was laid beside him in the family vault of the Willinghams!

If any thing could tend to increase the wretchedness of a wife and a mother thus suddenly bereaved, that of Lady Maria might very reasonably be aggravated by the knowledge that her three daughters were unprovided for—that she had nothing to expect from the liberality of Sir Joseph—and that her own jointure did not exceed twelve hundred a-year! Her immediate anxiety was to quit the scene of her past glories and present mortification. Claudia was nearly thirteen, and Eleanor scarcely a year her junior. Both might derive considerable advantage by completing their education on the Continent; and she felt that she should escape the spectacle of Sophia's accession to the throne of Heddeston, by a temporary residence abroad. Now this proposition was a most unexpected relief to the mind of Sir Joseph; and partly moved by gratitude, and partly by some natural feelings of regard towards his worthy brother's memory, he actually proposed to take charge during her

absence of little Minnie, who was too young to be a pleasant travelling companion; and went the still further length of presenting his three nieces with a deed of annuity for a hundred pounds per annum apiece! Three hundred a year was an immense concession from a man like Joseph!

All these favours were reluctantly but graciously accepted by the humbled Lady Maria. Two months afterwards, she sailed for France with her two beautiful girls, deeply intent upon projects for their future aggrandisement; but thinking little of the child she left behind, or of the grave of that husband of her youth, who had loved and valued her so much beyond her deserts.

CHAPTER V.

Elle n'aime ni sa patrie, ni ses enfans, ni ceux qui lui ont donné le jour; elle ne connoit d'autre parenté que la fortune.—*Caractéres de Dion Chrysostome.*

It is astonishing with what facility selfish people can transfer such affections as they have to bestow to the objects best calculated to advance their interests and favour their views. I have already acknowledged that, for twelve long years, Lady Maria Willingham had maintained an extraordinary insensibility towards her daughters; and that, without reference to their prior claim upon her maternal tenderness, she had remained indifferent to the expansion of Claudia's surpassing loveliness, and Eleanor's brilliant abilities. But scarcely had the grave closed upon her noble boy—upon the mainspring of all her hopes, and all her ambition—when the word "connection," whispered in her ear by old Lady Monteagle in the course of her first neighbourly visit of condolence, produced a singular revolution in the worldly mind of the calculating mother.

"I trust to your prudence, my dear Lady Maria," the sagacious dowager had observed, "not to remain abroad *too* long. In four years your eldest girl will be presentable;

and with her beauty, and the accomplishments she will acquire in her residence abroad, think what a *connection* she may form in England — think what an advantage her early marriage may prove to the rest of her family."

It was Lady Maria's vidual cue to be silent and pensive; and howbeit she listened with startled consciousness, she continued to shake her well-frilled head, and to fix her downcast gaze upon her owu weepers.

"For the sake of your helpless children, my dear friend," resumed Lady Monteagle, "you must learn to moderate your amiable sensibility, and to exert yourself. When I lost poor dear Lord M.— it is full thirty years ago, but I remember it as well as yesterday — I got into a sad, moping, nervous way; and my family physician, who saw the disadvantage it must be to four grown up daughters to have the spectacle of my hypochondriacism always before their eyes, ordered me to Bath, and prescribed a pint of mulled claret every evening before going to bed. My recovery was miraculous."

"Oh, my dear Lady Monteagle! you have never known what it is to be driven like an outcast from the scene of all your wedded happiness. Heaven knows that, with my children's society, a cottage and competence is all I require; but to forsake the spot where I have enjoyed the perfection of worldly felicity — where — where ——" a white pocket-handkerchief, well applied, superseded a world of eloquence.

"Nay, my dearest Lady Maria — my excellent friend," remonstrated the dowager, laying a skinny grasp upon her arm — "I cannot allow you to indulge in these fruitless reminiscences. It is true that your present trial is deeply afflicting" — she thought of her own comfortable jointure and comfortable dower-house, as she spoke — "but you must look forward to better times. What would have been your feelings, had you been left with three or four unprovided younger sons hanging upon you, instead of those lovely girls? — I consider a handsome daughter as a sort of provision for the rest of her family."

"Alas! my dear friend, *you* have such a sanguine, active mind! — such a masculine understanding! — while I ——"

"You must rally yourself, and assume the fortitude becoming your position. Why now, just look at *my* Margaret; she was nothing compared with *your* girls, and see what a match she has made! She is at the head of London society — quite a leader of fashion — a first rate establishment in town, and a palace you know in Northamptonshire. My girls had not a shilling: they had nothing but birth, and the devil's beauty — *youth;* but before Margaret had been married a year, she managed to get off her eldest sister, who had forfeited even *that* claim to admiration — persuaded poor old gouty Sir Cecil Dynevour that she was the best manager in the world; and Marian is now a widow with twelve thousand a-year at her own disposal. The other two girls, to be sure, have hung on hand; but, as far as *I* am concerned, they are as good as settled. Lady Stapylford has only that one wild boy to occupy her attention; and whenever her lord goes to Paris, which is pretty often, or forms a shooting party on his fenny Cambridgeshire estates, Margaret has her sisters to keep her company during his absence. The rest of the year they usually make out with Lady Dynevour. Since my first daughter made so excellent a connection, I do assure you that I have never once found myself obliged to pass a season in town at my own expense; and I predict that a day will soon come, when *you* will find yourself profiting by the same advantages."

"Excellent connection — good match — hang on hand — get off — make out — devil's beauty — leader of *ton* — jointure and settlements." Claudia and Eleanor Willingham, who had been loitering unperceived over an embroidered frame at the other end of the room, were considerably puzzled by these mysterious phrases. Neither the recollected precepts of their discarded governess, nor the folio edition of Johnson's Dictionary, to which they speedily applied for enlightenment, tended to develope the enigma. They little imagined the long apprenticeship they were about to serve to the horrible calling, of which these words may be regarded as the initiatory cabala; they little suspected that their future destiny was comprehended in the rapid impression produced on the mind of their mother by

Lady Monteagle's seemingly incomprehensible harangue. When she rang for her carriage, they simply but silently hailed her departure as a relief from a bore; they knew not to what future bitterness of heart they had been devoted by her prospective counsels. For the present, indeed, they felt only grateful to her for her friendly promises; for she had undertaken to keep an inquisitorial eye upon little Minnie's position in the household of her uncle, and to report progress in a close correspondence. They loved their sister dearly;—every one loved Minnie (except her mother). But she was only five years old — was already extremely attached to her cousins, Charles and Mary; and they felt that she would probably be happier, and certainly far better off, by remaining in her early home, with her own nurse, and pets, and garden to amuse her, than by rambling over France and Italy in search of economy and education with the rest of the family.

With this impression on their minds, the adieus of the elder sisters were as little tinctured with pain or apprehension as those of Minnie herself; who found, in their promise of a speedy return, all the consolation her little heart required for its first transient tears. Succeeding days, and weeks, and months, fortunately tended to confirm their flattering anticipations of her welfare: every letter which reached the travellers from the county of Kent, including the tall straight formal Italian specimen of dowager penmanship, which emanated from Monteagle Park, the diffuse and minute epistles in which Sir Joseph set forth his proceedings towards his niece, his estate, and the world in general; and the well-sprawled sheet of foolscap over which the good-natured hand of Charles Willingham was wont to guide that of his little cousin into sundry details respecting nurse Worley's rheumatism, and her own favourite dormice, bore witness to Minnie's happiness, and to the kindness of her uncle and aunt.

With Lady Willingham — for Miss Bodham had now progressed into that sublime supremacy — this kindness was at present exhibited in a passive form. She was at present equally debarred from interfering with Minnie's pleasures, and from enjoying those which her new dignities might

have been supposed to heap upon her head. The daughter, whose birth had been coeval with that of Lady Maria's last rejected pledge, proved to be a most unfortunate object: miserably deformed, and scarcely less deficient in the powers of the mind than of the body. Yet such is the merciful influence of nature upon a mother's heart, that all the maternal solicitudes of Lady Willingham appeared concentrated in her tender watchfulness over this helpless little being. She had wisely counselled her husband to give up the lease of that splendid mansion in Grosvenor Place, which she regarded as an unappeasable Mammoth that had swallowed up what ought to have been appropriated to savings for daughters' portions by his predecessor.

But the advantages of London medical advice soon prompted her to suggest the purchase of another. The first time that the mighty family waggon, on whose frontal the Christian name of Joseph had been freshly interposed instead of that of Charles, between *Sir* and *Willingham, Bart.*, rumbled, with its well-hayed burden, along the London Road, its unwieldy progress originated no longer in parliamentary duties, or in projects of frivolous pleasure. Lady Willingham would have cared little for the London season, had it not afforded her an opportunity of placing her little afflicted child in the hands of one of those barbarous charlatans, who do not hesitate to affix their torturing irons upon limbs already wasted by the approach of death; or to promise "the benefits of their system" to a frame on which the work of mortal decomposition is already half begun. A sanguine mother is easily deluded by promises so specious; and any one who had looked upon Sophia's eager countenance as it became irradiated by the flattering declarations of the impostor would have instantly forgiven her all her vulgarity and all her meanness. A good and tender mother is a glorious being. Yes! the ex-Bodham was worth fifty Lady Marias.

It was, probably, to her contemporaneous sympathy with the dying child, that Minnie was principally indebted for her aunt's extraordinary partiality and indulgence. I have said, indeed, that every body loved her: she was one of those buoyant, joyous beings, whose presence, like the irra-

diation of a living sunbeam, confers an indefinite consciousness of pleasure; whose smile and voice and endearments find an unerring way to the heart. She was lovely, it is true, and graceful and intelligent as a child might be; but it was neither her beauty, grace, nor talent, which wrought the spell; it was all these, combined with an utter guilelessness of soul, with a total absence of that selfishness which so often deteriorates the caresses of childhood. But she had still another and a surpassing charm in the eyes of Lady Willingham. Accustomed, through her infant companionship with her own father, to the sight of physical misfortune, and to the task of soothing its irritations, her little gladsome footsteps became insensibly moderated as she approached the sick chamber of her cousin, and her little voice hushed into the gentleness becoming its stagnant atmosphere. She would devise a thousand inventions for the amusement of the invalid, or sit for hours in watchful tranquillity beside her couch, while the mother permitted herself to snatch some hasty interval of repose or refreshment; and, of all the persons ministering to her aid or comfort, it was Minnie alone whom the sufferer appeared to recognise with grateful pleasure.

Mary Willingham, the elder daughter, was a personage wholly incapable of these kindly demonstrations. She was a girl of singular endowments, of a reflective turn of mind, of strong principles, and excellent disposition; but her faults were those of undeniable inheritance. She was demure — calm even to apparent insensibility, and reserved beyond the sanguine prompting of her girlish years. Sharing the general predilection in favour of the adopted inmate of her father's house, she had eagerly bestowed her protection and solicitude and instruction upon little Minnie; but without endearing the gift by a single fond expression. She would have considered such an indulgence of her feelings as indelicate and unbecoming. She was, in short, a formal, matter-of-fact kind of girl, fulfilling the duties of her education — reverencing her parents, and obeying her governess; but beyond this automatous mode of existence, she did not appear to cherish a single natural impulse.

Her brother Charles, the heir expectant to all the dignities of Heddeston — dignities which, under the present dynasty, were reinforced by the command of considerable monied independence — appeared to be only a refrigerated edition of his impassive sister. In a boy, too, this defect of feeling — this moral ossification of the heart — showed with thrice double deformity; it amounted to an air of sullen selfishness; and the apparent indifference with which both the one and the other withheld their participation from Lady Willingham's anxious exertions in favour of her crippled child, was pretty generally attributed to a mean jealousy of her maternal partiality. Mrs. Darnham even went so far as to insinuate to her confidantes of the neighbourhood, that Mr. Charles's unusual devotion to his little cousin arose from an amiable desire to pique and retaliate upon the absurd predilection of his mother.

At length, as might have been reasonably desired by all parties, the afflicted child was released from its mortal thraldom; and Mary and Charles addressed themselves to the task of soothing Lady Willingham's grief with amiable and unostentatious, but ill-directed sympathy. Sir Joseph made divers prolonged harangues to his family upon the duty of submitting, without a murmur, to the dispensations of Providence, which might have suited the birth of the little cripple better than its decease; with every other possible variation of common-place, peculiar to this species of domestic calamity. He assured them that he felt the loss of his daughter to be a sort of counterbalance to the prosperity of his worldly affairs; and, having assembled all the domestics of the family, he favoured them with a long and pertinent address upon the brevity and uncertainty of human existence. As Sir Joseph uttered his moralities in a serious and measured voice, and was attired in a customary suit of solemn black, even the foolish, fat scullion herself regarded it as subordinate and dutiful to melt into tears. But certain of the grey-headed coadjutors of Dickinson and Co. could by no means persuade themselves to take warning by the premature fate of their master's unfortunate babe; and many of the matrons of the family secretly determined that the brevity of human existence

could not have been more satisfactorily exemplified than on the present occasion.

His son and daughter endured his prolixity with their usual respectful submission; and Lady Willingham, long accustomed to his diffuse platitudes, refrained not from her tears at the instigation of Sir Joseph's homily. But little Minnie did much towards her consolation. She would sit with her, book on knee, in silent companionship within the lonely chamber endeared by so many mournful remembrances; or stroll out with her, hand in hand, towards Heddeston church, the sight of which refreshed with renewed tears the memory of her child.

Nor did the lapse of years weaken or destroy this intimate association; she still remained, in Lady Willingham's eyes, a living memento of what little Sophia could, or should, or might have become; and although, as Mary slowly outgrew the authority of the governess, her little cousin was duly consigned to the place she had vacated, Minnie Willingham remained the especial darling and *protegée* of her aunt. Her own daughter was seventeen, and Charles had already risen to some eminence at Eton; yet neither of them had proved or exhibited one moment's envy of the favour bestowed upon their cousin.

From Lady Maria, meanwhile, the most satisfactory letters were periodically received; and nothing could be more plausibly devised than the motives suggested for the prolongation of her residence on the Continent. Financial foresight — an anxiety to accomplish her daughters under the hands of the first masters at an inconsiderable cost — a desire, by present economy, to render their future *début* in England more brilliant than her available means might command — induced her, she wrote, to forego the company of her beloved little Maria, and to trespass thus unreasonably upon the hospitality of Heddeston Court in her favour. She depicted herself as a martyr to maternal duty; as renouncing her beloved country, the society of her nearest relatives, the sight of a spot associated with hallowed reminiscences of conjugal happiness, for the sake of her elder girls; pathetically lamenting, at the same time, that her narrow income debarred her from the valued privilege of

bestowing upon them that solid English education, those excellent principles — instilled and actively exemplified — of rigid English morality, which so well become, and so powerfully sustain, the domestic firesides of our own happy island!

Sir Joseph, from a fellow-feeling, warmly applauded this well-worn clap-trap. But Lady Willingham, naturally lynx-eyed, and sharpened into fierce acuteness by feelings of rivalry and personal aversion, permitted herself to compare the tendency of these pathetic Jeremiades, with a more natural statement of the case as it flowed from the undesigning pens of Claudia and Eleanor, in their letters to their little sister and their cousin Mary.

On their first arrival at Paris, these letters, indited in a flowing English hand, and with an exuberance of girlish spirits, set forth nothing but their ecstasies at the enchanting novelties by which they were surrounded; and it might plainly be discerned that Lady Maria, despite her widow's weeds of only six months' standing, by no means suffered either herself or her daughters to be overwhelmed with the monotony of woe. She was either unconscious of, or indifferent to, the strict formalities observed on such occasions in France; where it is esteemed a violation of all decorum for a person in family mourning to be seen at at any public place.

By degrees, the flowing caligraphy of English penmanship became cramped with the perpendicularity, and curly-tailed z, and s, and r, of the minute handwriting of France; while the style it served to convey begun to expand into that luxuriant fervency of address which characterises the epistolary correspondence of our ardent neighbours. In another year, it grew deformed with Gallicisms; in another, it found its way into downright French; and, in the course of a fourth, their residence of a few months in Italy enabled both Claudia and her sister to effect something of a polyglot text.

Still their letters remained extremely amusing, and lively, and natural. It was clear that in spite of the toils of their education — in spite of the music, singing, painting, and Babel-like confusion of tongues of which they complained

as a daily infliction — they were made the constant companions and excuse of all their mother's dissipation. Thirty thousand francs per annum form a respectable income on the Continent; and during a season at Florence, and two winters at Naples, Lady Maria found herself enabled to maintain both an equipage and a table, after the fashion of the place. During the Carnival they spoke of their gaieties as unceasing. At one time there was a masked ball, from which the English ambassadress would not hear of their absence; at another, their mamma had been prevailed on to let them fill some juvenile parts in amateur theatricals. Their Parisian experience was of such high account in *proverbes, charades,* and *tableaux,* that on such occasions they could not be spared. In short, upon some plea or other, they appeared to have found their way into society at an age when the nursery or the schoolroom should have been the shelter of their inexperience; and they anticipated being presented and "coming out" in England, while it was evident that for some time past they had never been *in.*

At length the long-appointed period arrived! Claudia, who was now eighteen, and who had conditioned that her sister should make her first appearance in London the same season with herself, wrote to announce their immediate arrival. A house was taken for them in a third-rate situation, such as Lady Maria's limited income might justify; and Minnie, who had accompanied her uncle and aunt to their own formal mansion in Grosvenor Square, to await the event, had at length the gratification of a picturesque embrace from her long absent mother, and a thousand fervent and tearful caresses from her two lovely sisters.

Lady Willingham was duly and appropriately thanked; Mary was presented with her set of Roman mosaic and Neapolitan coral; and Sir Joseph's hand was affectionately squeezed by the grateful Lady Maria. As she looked round, however, upon the humble comforts of an abode which the recent habitation of an Italian palace and a Parisian hotel endowed with a somewhat homely air, she could not but think that her brother-in-law might have seized on so auspicious an occasion as that of the *entrée* of

his nieces into society, to expand into something of a more liberal vein. It would have been so easy for him to engage, on his own account, a house for the season more becoming to the name of Willingham, and more advantageous to the views of the fair *débutantes*. There is nothing so injudicious as to fight in a matrimonial skirmish under ensigns of poverty.

CHAPTER VI.

What are these wondrous civilising arts—
This Roman polish? ADDISON.

"WELL, dear mamma!" exclaimed Claudia to Lady Maria, having elevated her glass to take a deliberate survey of the apartments, immediately on the departure of Sir Joseph and his family.

"Well, my dear girls! can you conceive any thing more mortifyingly beggarly than the whole affair?"

"And this," observed Eleanor, drawing her chair towards the fireplace, and establishing her feet after a fashion which might have evoked the shade of her grandsire from the Heddeston vault — "and this is the sea-coal fire — the *comfortable* chimney-corner — for which I have so often heard you sigh in Italy! These are the snug rooms I have heard you regret! This blanket of dingy woollen is the capital carpet, the remembrance of which rendered our clean and well-waxed *parquets* insupportable! I wish you joy, dear mamma, of your inauguration among all these blessings; but not without feeling some little surprise at the preference."

"Oh! you must not compare the attractions of dirty London lodgings with those of our excellent mansion in Grosvenor Place, or with the comforts of Heddeston. All this I acknowledge to be detestable; and did I imagine, my dear girls, that you were likely to find your permanent homes of the same degraded and miserable character, I

should not hesitate to fly back to Paris with greater speed than that which brought us hither. Mediocrity in England is a worse than insupportable destiny; and the luxuries assigned to poverty itself on the Continent offer a far preferable alternative. But believe me also, that there exists no station in life, from one end of Europe to the other, which will bear comparison with the splendour and refinement of the highest class of English society; — in which, before long, I trust to see you both advantageously placed."

"I fear you are too sanguine. At Paris and in Naples success in society is far more easily attained than I can believe it to be in this wide wilderness of London, where there are so many formidable competitors."

"My dear Eleanor! every thing will depend upon yourselves. With a little management on your parts, and vigilance on mine, there is every probability that you will both make excellent matches. Your connections on both sides are excellent; — you have just as much beauty and accomplishment as is requisite for attraction; — the English connections and friendships you have formed abroad are all in your favour; — and you have been preceded here by the reputation of having refused several good matches in Italy."

"Thanks to your generalship, mamma! I am convinced that both the Duca di Alcastora, and Claudia's Piedmontese prince, were satisfied by your style of living that we had very tolerable fortunes; and that, on their enlightenment, the preliminaries of either marriage would not have proceeded far. On the profit-and-loss alliance system of the Continent, we could never, in fact, have formed even a respectable connection among foreigners."

"A principal motive for my return to England — the only European land of disinterested love! In France you must have expected, at best, to be chosen by way of '*ménagères*' — to inspect the *lessive* and *confitures*."

"I really feel at present," observed the indolent Claudia, looking round the dingy and dismantled chamber, "as if I should prefer the *lessive*, and all its domestic accompaniments of joyous gaiety, to the atmosphere of this

desolate England. I am positively chilled into a moral ague."

"Patience! my dear child! patience! To-morrow every thing will wear a different aspect. A few flowers placed about the room will enliven it beyond your recognition; then we can strew all these unmeaning tables with your *étrennes* of the year — with our new caricatures — and a few Neapolitan novelties, which will attract the gaping curiosity of our visiters — and will serve, like a showy domino on an ugly woman, to disguise the nakedness of the land. Oh! it will all do very well in a day or two; before I send round my cards, and sound my tocsin to the little circle of exclusive fashion by which I intend to surround myself, all will go well."

"Don't you think Minnie is growing very pretty, mamma?" enquired Claudia with a yawn.

"You must remember, my dear, that you saw her in contrast with Mary Willingham; who remains, as she ever was, a flagrant instance of the awkwardness of 'nature's journeymen.' When Minnie is once settled at home, depend on it, we shall find her full of awkward missishness: she only looked pretty to-night, because she was flushed and animated by our arrival."

"Oh, pardon me!" interrupted Eleanor. "Her features are extremely delicate, and her figure slight, and well-turned, and graceful. I was most agreeably surprised; and could not refrain from expressing the feeling to Mary, who replied that she was the most interesting little girl in the world. I almost forgave her own awkwarkness, she seemed so unaffectedly fond of poor Minnie."

"I detest interesting little girls!" exclaimed Lady Maria pettishly; "and I am only too sure that we shall find her miserably *de trop* in our arrangements; for she is too old to be left with the servants, and I cannot afford a governess. However, even if the Willinghams were inclined to keep her — which evidently they are *not* — it would have a very strange appearance were I to leave her longer in their hands. Therefore, all things considered, I think I shall look out for a school on a limited scale, where I can send her to be safe, and out of the way."

Poor Minnie! And it was to the return of relations such as these she had looked with such confiding affection; it was of the caresses of this calculating mother, of these critical sisters, she had been dreaming for months, and only waking to anticipations of a yet more fervent reality.—Poor little Minnie!—her disappointment was great indeed; and when she returned home from her first chilling interview with her nearest relations, her sleepless pillow—and seldom is the pillow of childhood sleepless—was visited by sore misgivings for the future, by many self-rebukings for the ingratitude which had hitherto withheld her unqualified affection from those, under whose fosterhood her recent years had passed so happily, so fearlessly away. She had scarcely allowed her little heart to indulge, to the full extent of its wishes, her love for Charles and Mary, her gratitude towards Sir Joseph and her aunt. She had checked herself repeatedly by those watchwords of duty, "My *own* mother—my *own* sisters;" and now, when she found that mother and those sisters so moderately inclined to sanction her eager claims, she could no longer venture to bestow her rejected affections upon the objects from whom she had previously laboured to estrange the gift.

Minnie was only fourteen years old, and was by no means endowed with a precocity of worldly wisdom; but she had sense and sensibility enough to regard with terror her approaching removal from a home wherein she had been so long and so indulgently domesticated. She had too just and too amiable a sense of things to interrogate Charles and Mary—on all other occasions her oracles and bosom counsellors—touching their opinion of the conduct of her own family, or her prospects of happiness; she was fully conscious that the topic should remain sacred to her lips and ears.

A single week, passed in Seymour Street, served but to confirm Minnie Willingham's apprehensions and painful recoil upon herself. She experienced the daily and vexatious trial of hearing the friends she so tenderly esteemed, and who had in fact so worthily won the gratitude of her heart, held up to the most unsparing ridicule. Her sister Eleanor was an admirable mimic; and her delineations of

Lady Willingham's prim self-concentration, of Sir Joseph's diffuse and common-place prose, appeared to form the sole amusement of their dull family re-union. Even this Minnie might have taught herself to endure; but when she saw Mary—her dear and indulgent cousin Mary—portrayed with all the twitchings of her habitual nervousness, with the miraculously awkward gait which her timidity assumed before strangers, and with the blush and struggling speech which had prefaced her replies to the invidious questions of her cousins—she could not repress her honest indignation. It was in vain, however, that she put forth a claim to forbearance, in Mary's affectionate protection of herself; it was in vain she urged against their satires that Mary, in spite of her *gaucherie*, was in truth remarkably accomplished and well-informed.

"*Il se peut qu'elle ne manque pas d'instruction*," replied Eleanor; "but the word accomplishment embraces a wide field; and I tell you the poor girl is a mere savage. I have no doubt she has been brought up according to the most approved system of the Bodhamites; but I tell you she is a savage."

"Mary has had the best masters in London, for several years past. She is a scientific musician, paints in oil, is mistress of French and German——"

"All which tends to justify my declaration—that she is a savage! Science in amateur music is decidedly barbarous; oil-painting is an unseemly and impertient pretension on the part of a female artist; and as to her qualifications as a linguist,

> She speaks the French of Stratford school, by Bow—
> The French of Paris she did never know,

and a woman of fashion might as well talk Iroquois as German. Yes, Mary Willingham is decidedly, and upon the most approved principles—a savage."

"Poor cousin Mary! had she passed a year or two in the land where poodles are taught to dance, and cooks and hair-dressers are termed artists, no doubt she would have a better title to your approbation," cried Minnie, stung to the quick by the malicious comments of her sisters. But this

imprudent sally sealed her own destiny. Lady Maria affected to be shocked by her flippancy and insubordination; and within a week, the seminary, "on a limited scale," was hastily selected: Minnie and her trunks were securely deposited there as animate and inanimate lumber, which might very well be spared from Seymour Street; while her mother and sisters began to enjoy, unmolested, their own witty enmity against her former benefactors.

Lady Willingham, meanwhile, was particularly gratified by this apparent alteration in her young *protegée*'s destiny. Despite the icy listlessness of her middle age, she was not an unobservant woman; prosperity and adversity had equally tended to soften her heart; the brilliancy of her position in life had served to expand the original narrowness of her mind; the faults of her youthful temper were somewhat moderated, and she had already detected so much that was mischievous in the character of her sister-in-law, so much that was objectionable in the acquired tone of her nieces, that she rejoiced to know her little favourite was secure, for the present, from the evil influence of their example.

Mary, however, was more charitable, or less discerning. She was wonderfully impressed with the elegance and graces of her travelled cousins; and was herself of so ingenuous and liberal a disposition, that it never occurred to her to suspect the existence of inferior qualities beneath so specious a surface. Modestly, though silently, conscious of her own personal defects, she admired their beauty, their foreign graces, their trifling accomplishments, nor deemed it possible that they could have been left wholly ignorant, in all those unavailing branches of education which were likely to remain inostensible. Eleanor, indeed, who was gifted with brilliant abilities, had contrived to pick up some curious stores of general information in an unchecked course of desultory reading; but Claudia, with her music and her miniatures, her melting Roman intonation, and her polished Parisian idiom, remained a dunce of the first water. As to moral principle, both were equally in a state of mental darkness. To form good connections, maintain a good appearance in society on small means, and obtain the greatest

portion of amusement for the least possible quantity of sordid expenditure, were the only duties hitherto inculcated by the maternal instructions of Lady Maria.

"I really wonder," observed Sir Joseph Willingham to his lady, as he sat sipping a fiery vinous decoction called Port, some weeks after the arrival of his late brother's family, "that Lady Maria, with her very limited income, should have made up her mind to settle in London. I can understand her finding herself thoroughly tired of the dirty comfortless ways of the Continent; but I should really have thought that Bath, or Brighton, or Cheltenham, or some cheap watering-place, where amusement may be had at a reasonable rate, and no horses are required, would have far better suited her purpose: but, as I always say, it is useless to attempt deciding on the views of other people."

"Oh! as to Lady Maria's views, they are far more evident than easy to influence. London is the most profitable matrimonial market, and London must therefore forward her speculations, at any cost."

"But my nieces might have made a very comfortable match at Brighton. She herself picked up my brother at Ramsgate."

"Considering her moderate jointure, and her daughters' want of fortune, I doubt whether Lady Maria considers her own marriage a favourable precedent. For her girls, at all events, she entertains much higher pretensions; and she is so far justifiable, that they certainly boast a degree of beauty and elegance such as, in her best days, never fell to *her* share. I suspect she intends them to form very splendid alliances; to effect which, she has certainly chosen the most advantageous ground."

"Why yes," said Sir Joseph, looking complacently round his gloomy dining-room, "all men of distinction may certainly be found in the metropolis at one time or other of the year; and they are right — they would otherwise exile themselves beyond the limits of the spread of knowledge and the march of intellect. Do you know, my dear Sophia, if *I* were to remain at Heddeston myself all the year round, I really think I should end with becoming a very dull fellow."

Lady W. sneered over her dried cherries; while Mary, after playing with her spoon a minute or two, to disguise her embarrassment, observed, "And Lady Maria has so many personal connections in town, so many noble relatives, who will of course assist in forwarding her views!"

"When her little girl was left isolated in England, I never perceived that any of her ladyship's illustrious clan troubled themselves to show her the least civility, unless it were old General de Vesci and his somniferous wife; and I am sure, during poor Sir Charles's time, Heddeston Court used to be filled from September to March with nothing but De Vescis and Lorimers."

"Lorimers?"

"Old Lady de Vesci was a Lorimer."

"Any relation to Charles's Eton friend?"

"Grand aunt, I believe."

"Ah! I dare say she will find all these people civil enough as far as occasionally chaperoning her daughters, or giving them opera tickets, or the pattern of a dress," said Sir Joseph.

"Or lending their carriage to Lady Maria," significantly interposed Lady Willingham, with an interrogatory glance at her husband.

"If you mean, Sophia, that her ladyship is likely to consider *mine* at her disposal, I beg to observe that she deceives herself altogether. If she chooses to gratify her own vanity by settling in London on fifteen hundred a year (for I leave her the full allowance for my three nieces, although I undertake Minnie's school expenses as if she were a child of our own) ——"

"And so she *is*," said both Lady W. and Mary, in a low tone.

"Why it is solely her own affair. In that three hundred a year she must be aware that I have done my utmost — ay! and as the father of a family, more than many would have done, considering the slights she marked towards us all during Sir Claude's and Sir Charles's lifetime. I trust I understand my duty towards the widow of my brother," continued Sir Joseph, solemnly, "and I trust I have strength of mind faithfully to fulfil it; but as to having my

horses out night and day to please her, it is a thing I will never do — *never!* I consider it incumbent upon every man — more especially one who has officiated as a Christian minister — to be unceasing in his tender mercies towards the brute creation. What is it Cowper says ——"

"Never mind what Cowper says; in this instance your own opinions and determination are far more to the purpose."

"Well, my dear! *my* determination is that *you* may take Lady Maria or my nieces out shopping whenever it suits you (except into the City or the Strand of a Monday, on account of scratching the carriage against the market waggons); but if she should ever take the liberty of applying for my equipage as an independent loan, you will have the goodness to reply, that it is entirely against my principles to distress my horses; and you may add, Sophia,"— he looked askance over his wine glass to see how the assertion *took* with his spouse, — "that I am tolerably positive in my opinions, when they have been once seriously formed. You know I refused Mary and yourself the gratification of the Wenster archery meeting last year, because Anthony thought the horses wanted physicking, and that the pull was too great."

"Very true," replied Lady Willingham mildly, and with a full remembrance that the objection had arisen entirely on her *own* part. "But you need not make yourself prematurely uneasy, my love, for the De Vescis have taken a house in Portman Square to be near Lady Maria; and you know the General has a superb set of horses, and several carriages, and ——"

"Mighty absurd! for his fortune at the utmost is ten thousand a year! which does not go far, where there is a place in the country, a borough, and a house in town to be kept up. To be sure the General is not a family man, which *I* find to my cost makes a considerable difference in one's calculations."

"Then old Lady Monteagle is in town this year, with her daughter Lady Dynevour. They have both carriages, and can occupy but one."

"Ay, ay! But you will find that neither of them will be very solicitous to lend the other to Lady Maria Willing-

ham. You women understand one another's manœuvres so well; — you know so perfectly what it is to keep a pair of wretched horses shivering in the cold, while you are tumbling over drawers of ribands which you never intend to buy, and matching silks which you have already purchased at some other shop; — to say nothing of hearing them cough in the street half the night, while you are finishing your toilet, or engaged with a last half hour of scandal at some dowager's rout." Sir Joseph chuckled, for he felt that he had been more than commonly witty and eloquent.

"And then, you know, Sophia, an old woman like Lady Monteagle is always under the dominion of a parcel of grey-headed servants; and you are well aware that her ladyship no more dare ask either of her drunken footmen, or her fat coachman, to go out at night, than she dare venture herself. It is not every one who is so thoroughly the master of his establishment as *I* am."

"Very true, my dear. By the way, Mary, what did your brother's last letter say about young Stapylford? — How has he got out of his last scrape? — I met Lady Monteagle this morning in Seymour Street, who was very anxious to learn how her grandson had escaped."

"As usual, no doubt, upon other people's shoulders," observed Sir Joseph.

"I fancy papa is right," replied Mary, mildly. "Charles's account of the business is so very confused, so different from his usual clear style of letter-writing, that I am persuaded Mr. Stapylford was rescued in this instance, as he has often been before, by my brother and Lorimer uniting to pay the damage. Lord Stapylford is so very shabby with his son, that it would be useless to apply at home on such occasions."

"I wonder what Charles, or any one else, sees to like in that young man?"

"It often surprises *me*," said Mary. "He is continually disgracing himself by some mad-cap folly or other; and yet the wisest and most amiable of his companions always appear willing to become a sacrifice for him."

"I am glad to hear *you* talk so of Mr. Stapylford, my dear Mary," said Sir Joseph, with an air of paternal authority. "I have sometimes doubted whether I were

quite wise in having such a wild young man so much at Heddeston."

"*Young man!* my dear papa!" exclaimed Mary, with a blush; "Stapylford is a year younger than my brother, and two years younger than Lorimer or myself. I do not believe he is sixteen till next year. If there is any thing to fear, it is for poor Minnie; you know he always calls her his little wife."

"Yes, while he provokes her by cutting off her doll's head, or her spaniel's ears."

"I think the 'little wife' system a very bad one," said Sir Joseph solemnly. "If the alliance is really eligible, that sort of premature notice is always sure to put a stop to it; and it only serves, when the girl and boy are grown up, to embarrass them in each other's presence. I remember, when I was a stripling, Lady Monteagle always persisted in calling her daughter Margaret *my* little wife; and long after I was engaged to you, Sophia, my father used to make Miss Margaret and myself stand up together, to see which of the young couple was the tallest. Now, do you know, I cannot help fancying that Lady Stapylford blushes whenever I speak to her to this very day."

Lady Willingham, who was well aware that the fair Margaret — a thorough-going Almack's woman of fashion — had not blushed for twenty years, to be visible through her rouge, and who was by no means fond of hearing her own clandestine engagement alluded to in her daughter's presence, took this *historiette* as a cue for removal to the drawing-room, leaving Sir Joseph to deposit his long thin legs on the marble chimney-piece, in a meditative attitude, becoming the anxious after-dinner solitude of "a father of a family." At present his thoughts were exclusively occupied in conjecturing by what means Lady Maria Willingham and her daughters had become so extremely intimate with the Duke of Lisborough as to be invited to Calmersfield for the ensuing Easter holydays; — with an occasional stray digression towards the choice of a private tutor for his son Charles, who had recently removed from Eton to Oxford.

CHAPTER VII.

It is one thing to understand persons, and another thing to understand matters; for many are perfect in men's humours, that are not greatly capable of the real parts of business, which is the constitution of one who hath studied men more than books. BACON's *Essays.*

In the Duke of Lisborough's intimacy with the family of his late brother, there was, however, nothing that need have puzzled the comprehension of so sagacious a person as Sir Joseph Willingham. His Grace was a frequent traveller; had sojourned repeatedly in Paris, Florence, Rome, and Naples, during Lady Maria's settlement in those cities. He found her current in the very best society of each: he knew her to be as well connected as himself, and, in some remote degree, with himself; and, moreover, during their more recent acquaintance, he had discovered her to be the mother of two lovely girls — elegant, accomplished, fascinating — every thing, in short, which his bachelor predilections could desire. It was very natural that he should rejoice to hear they were about to settle in their native country; it was still more so that he should express a hope of seeing them frequently at Calmersfield Park. He had, in short, a long arrear of hospitality to repay to Lady Maria.

But the worthy proprietor of Heddeston Court was by no means the only person to whom the ensuing Easter visit afforded matter of surprise and speculation. The Duke of Lisborough had a married brother and a widowed sister, who kept vigilant watch and ward over the female arrivals at Calmersfield; and as both were equally British fixtures, and equally unversed in the fashionable currency of the Continent, neither Lord Robert Lorton nor Lady Grayfield were at first prepared to admit Lady Maria's justifiable claims to the attentions of their illustrious kinsman. No sooner had they managed to discover that she had two daughters, very handsome and very poor, than some degree of indignation mingled with their astonishment; but, as they had ascertained at the same time that Lady Maria

was a De Vesci, their own distant kinswoman, they perceived that it would be impossible, or indecent, to manœuvre her out of her invitation. The poor duke very naturally, but very superfluously, believed himself to be master of his own house. But this is a domestic point, on which others, besides Sir Joseph Willingham, are apt to deceive themselves.

Meanwhile, Lady Maria, unsuspicious of the consternation excited by her approach, proceeded to weave her plots in utter unconsciousness of the Argus eyes which waited on their developement. At the appointed period, Mademoiselle Céline contrived to adjust, in a capacious imperial, the *bérets* and *chapeaux parés de Miladi*, without infringing on the more important claims of the young ladies' ball-dresses and *canezous*—exquisite in their elaborate simplicity. Their newest music, including a *Romance à deux voix*, composed for them by Blangini, and a Mazurka, with an impossible name, forwarded to them at Paris by some Polish count—their *ex-cavaliere* of a former season — was duly deposited in its golden-hinged morocco portfolio; while their mother-of-pearl work-boxes were furnished with unfinished specimens of *broderie*, whose delicacy might have brought down on either fair Arachne the vengeance of Minerva; unless the suggestion of one of their most beloved and confidential friends were correct, that these *chef d'œuvres* of the needle had been purchased of an indigent *brodeuse* of the *Rue Vivienne*.

Certain it was, that during their residence at Calmersfield, not a single leaf, not the petal of a flower, was added to the performance; but then the Miss Willinghams were in such popular request! They were always wanted in the music-room, or the ball-room, or the billiard-room; to-day the duke insisted upon driving Claudia through the neighbouring villages in his *droski;* to-morrow Eleanor was selected as the companion of a "capability" walk, to decide upon the site of a kiosk, which it was his intention to construct in an elevated position of the gardens. Sometimes he had a cabinet of cameos to display — for what English nobleman escapes from Rome unbitten by epidemic connoisseurship, and unduped by the cognoscenti? Some-

times, on a rainy day, a new cotillon was to be practised in the dancing gallery; and one or other of Lady Maria's daughters was sure to be selected as his partner.

The girls themselves, with all that sanguine expectation and fearless enjoyment of passing pleasure, which is co-existent only with extreme youth, valued his preference solely for the amusement and variety it ensured to them in their daily pursuits; and even Lady Maria presumed not to hazard a hope that all this favour and intimacy would tend to any further advantage than a *début* in London of especial brilliancy. She was well aware that Calmersfield had long been regarded as a sort of *conservatoire* of fashion — an university of *ton*, wherein young ladies might take degrees, calculated to maintain their future reputation in the *beau monde;* and she was duly anxious that the honours thus attained by her accomplished daughters should be of the highest order. But neither Lady Grayfield nor Lord Robert gave her credit for this compulsory moderation; they believed her to be intent on crowning her fair offspring with strawberry leaves rather than with laurel!

Claudia and Eleanor, meanwhile, even had they been aware of the mistrustful and angry feelings thus excited against them, would have still maintained that courteous and buoyant animation which constituted the principal charm of their character and demeanour. Among the numerous arts they had learned on the Continent — and among them all it was, perhaps, the only one conducive to their personal happiness — was that of utter indifference to *les misères,* or those trifling grievances which form the daily and delightful grumbling-block of so many of our countrywomen. "*Pour porter légèrement la vie,*" says a French proverb, "*il faut savoir glisser sur bien des choses!*" Even frivolity has its axioms of philosophy; and strives to replace, by a degree of *pococurante* levity, the more humble Christian virtue of patience.

"I suspect Lady Grayfield does not like us," observed Eleanor Willingham to Lady Robert Lorton. "But what does her approbation signify? With the duke's *engouement* in our favour, and *your* friendship, dear Lady Robert, I

am perfectly careless what that animated matter-of-fact feels towards us, or thinks about us."

"You do yourselves justice," replied Lady Robert, the most fascinating little coquette in the world. "At your age you have no right to distract yourself with plans, and projects, and worldly foresight: leave them to Lady Maria as her own especial province; and enjoy the sunshine of life as long as its clouds will let you. Lord Robert and his sister delight in perplexing the brightest moments of existence by all the agonies of second sight; and are quite indignant when they find my sympathy waiting the actual occurrence of evil. I hate to turn back my head towards the dark shadow that follows me, or direct my telescope towards a coming storm."

"And I," said Eleanor, "have at present seen so little of the miseries of life, that I trouble myself as lightly with apprehension as with my last night's dreams."

"My dear child, one season of English fogs will reform your sin of light-heartedness altogether: I fear you will find, by dreary experience, that cheerful animation is regarded among us as a very malignant symptom. In other countries, virtue is depicted as a smiling nymph, with frank joyous eyes and gladsome footsteps; in Great Britain, she is typified as a doughty spinster, tricked in antique ruff and bonnet, starched pinners, and a rueful and mortified countenance."

"Her eloquence must be mighty indeed, if, under such a guise, she can continue to increase her train of proselytes."

"Oh! we blindfold our children in their infancy, and stimulate them by the hope of reward—by the sugar-plums of selfishness — to walk uprightly over the burning ordeal. My girls, like their foolish mother, are blest by nature with a very merry temperament; but they are not allowed to laugh after they are five years old. The duke, and Lord Robert, and Lady Grayfield, assure me that to be amused is a plebeian privilege; and they have provided a governess for my urchins, who is careful to train them up in fitting habits of well-bred solemnity. As to the dear duke, he has ventured somewhat nearer to the equator, indeed, than the

rest of his frozen family; and has Neapolitanised himself into a taste for guitars and smiling faces, the carnival and the Willinghams; but it costs Robert and his sister a world of pains to refrigerate him, on his return, into the dulness of phlegmatic indolence becoming the head of the house of Lisborough."

"But why does not Lady Grayfield satisfy herself with drilling her own children, and Lord Robert with training up his — not in the way they should go — but in the way they should stand still? Why cannot they allow the duke to amuse himself according to his own fancy, or as *they*, perhaps, may choose to consider it — his folly?"

"In the first place, it is the mania of the Lisborough family to believe that the eyes of the whole earth are fixed upon their proceedings; and that, from the days of Noah until now, their illustrious dynasty has remotely influenced the destinies of every quarter of the globe. Then Robert, who really persuades himself that he is very anxious his brother should marry, frets himself into a fever of consternation whenever he fancies that the wish is threatened with realisation, by any thing approaching to a real flirtation on poor Lisborough's part; and as to Lady Grayfield, —although it evidently matters very little to *her* eldest son whether Calmersfield be ever menaced with a duchess and an heir apparent,— she has been so long accustomed to manage her brother, and do the honours of himself and his possessions, that she entertains an instinctive hatred towards all the young ladies with whom he dances, and all the dowagers with whom he dines. I was apprehensive that her Gorgon brow would have petrified poor Lady Maria last night, when the duke took the second to your *Notturno*."

"She may calm all her alarms on my account," said Eleanor scornfully. "I do not deny my predilection in favour of the splendours and luxuries of Calmersfield, and his grace's many treasures of magnificence; but not for all these, and more, would I encounter the life of solemnity which will befall his wife. There is so much of *tête-à-tête* in English matrimony, that it cannot be measured by emblazoned parchments, by a golden balance, and

diamond weights, as we manage such matters on the Continent; the disposition and qualities of the future husband must be thrown into the scale."

"Oh! Lisborough has excellent qualities; he is good-tempered, and generous, and honourable. I am very fond of him, except on state occasions, when he acts the *grand seigneur*, and grows a bore."

"Claudia thinks him the wonder of the century. If Lord Robert has any thing to apprehend for his son, it is from *her*; but for me, he is much too formal. And now tell me, dearest Lady Robert, how is it that Lady Grayfield, who you say is so tenacious of her influence, and so jealous of the duke's regard, chances to be fond of *you*, who are his favourite beyond all rivalship?"

"Oh! all Charlotte's loves and courtesies are calculated by the most approved tables of interest. I was an heiress, you are to know, and as well descended as herself; so she spared neither effort nor blandishment to secure my marriage with her younger brother. She thought me a good match for Robert, and it was quite diverting to see how desperately she fell in love with me. After my marriage, without pretending to any skill in sorcery, I very soon found her out; and not being of a mysterious temper, made no secret of the discovery. But not angrily: I only laughed at all her little manœuvres, which she did not like; and made Lisborough laugh, which she liked still less."

"And thus you proceeded to open warfare."

"On the contrary, I remained as pacific as a herald. Charlotte has her weaknesses like the rest of us; but, in common with all the Lorton family, she has sterling qualities to form the counterbalance. So when I saw her vexed by my *persiflage*, I left off laughing, both actively and reflectively; for I only keep this sort of irony in *reserve*, as the most efficient weapon of defence practicable against the solemn high mightinesses of the earth."

"Then you still believe that it is fear which makes her so loving?"

"No; I give her credit for a better feeling on the present occasion. She is extremely attached to Robert, as belonging to the Lisborough dynasty; and to my children,

as being Lortons by right of inheritance ; and seeing that *they* all love me, and that I make them all happy, she honours me with a sort of collateral affection herself. But I am persuaded Lady Grayfield's original motive for preferring me as a sister-in-law, and tolerating Lisborough's partiality, was her observation of my indifference to the distinction. She saw that I would not be at the trouble of a manœuvre to secure a diadem ; and that I left the coveted task of managing the duke and his civil list entirely at her disposal ; — that all the little dirty patronage of trinkets from Rundell's, presentations to livings, seats in parliament, or seats in opera-boxes, was a matter of indifference to my indolent nature ; and, satisfied that she has nothing to lose by my rivalship, she allows Lisborough to like me as much as he pleases. I am one of the few people, you know, whom it is quite impossible for him to marry. And now let us commence our toilet ; for you are to understand that among the deadliest sins of omission and commission, according to his grace's estimate, is that of being too late for dinner."

The whole of this edifying conversation was duly unfolded by Eleanor to her sister, when the hair had been curled, and Mademoiselle Céline dismissed, that very night. But Claudia was in high spirits ; intoxicated with the increasing homage of the duke of Lisborough, she would listen to no remonstrances. She was neither inclined to suspect Lord Robert, nor to dread Lady Grayfield.

" Depend on it, dear Eleanor," pleaded the sanguine girl, " brothers and sisters have a very moderate influence in such cases. The duke may consult Lady Grayfield about new furnishing his saloon at Calmersfield, or Lord Robert about the equipage which he tells me Adams is building for him ; but it is precisely because he has no wife to whose better taste to refer. If his heart were once really touched, be assured that it would speak too loudly to admit of their further interference."

" If his heart were really touched ! But consider for a moment the difficulty of touching a heart that has been concentrated and wrapped up in long years of selfish independence ! The duke has been so accustomed to find his

pleasures and inclinations regarded as a first object, and to hear the attentions of unmarried women pointed out to his mistrust, that those instances of personal regard and preference, which might flatter and attach another man, must have become disgusting to himself."

"Nevertheless," said Claudia, looking complacently round the gilded panels and refulgent mirrors of their dressing-room, — "nevertheless, dear Nelly, 'tis a stake worth playing for. I like the duke better than any one of the Calmersfield guests; he shares in our modes of thinking and feeling, and enjoys all our favourite pursuits. I am persuaded he prefers me to any of the girls here who are so vehemently intent on devouring him; and at all events I shall lose nothing by encouraging his attentions."

"Unless it be your own heart, which you seem to account but lightly throughout the affair."

"My heart! — oh! if I thought the Duke of Lisborough's heart as secure as I *know* my own to be, I should become hopeless indeed! If he is selfish and mistrustful, what are *we?* If he is forewarned and forearmed against a matrimonial ambuscade, *what* is Claudia Willingham?"

"*A woman!* — a name including a general confession of sensitive weakness. However, if not forearmed, dearest Claudia, you *are* at least *forewarned;* and once more believe me, that, did any chance of success exist for your views, mamma would have been the very first to project and forward them: believe me, you have no hope of escaping the manœuvres of the Grayfield and her brother."

If any thing could excuse the obstinate infatuation of Claudia Willingham, it was the conduct of the duke himself. Among all his successive *engouemens,* none had ever appeared to possess him with half the intensity which now actuated his attention towards her. In their riding parties, he suffered no arm but his own to lift her to the saddle; in their evening dances he constantly claimed her hand, and would not hear of a change of partners. He insisted upon lingering by her side in the sculpture gallery, that he might point out his own favourite busts as subjects

for her pencil; and he would no longer allow her to walk, drive, sing, or work, except in compliance with his own especial whims and fancies. True it was, that never did the lovely Claudia appear so beautiful, or so graceful, as when blushing under his gaze, or turning away from his animated whispers; for her whole heart — her whole being — was inspired with an ardour to please, such as she had never felt before.

Even Lady Maria found herself compelled, by the jealous comments of the various mammas assembled at Calmersfield, to turn her attention towards these mutual symptoms. But although gratified beyond measure, and not altogether without hope of a favourable result, she was discreet enough to abstain from personal interference. Apparently altogether occupied with her darling Eleanor, who was sufficiently obliging to be afflicted with a singularly well-timed cold, she contrived to shut herself up with her second daughter, wraps, lozenges, and arra-root, so as to remain in seeming ignorance of the general proceedings of Calmersfield, and the nervous irritation of Lord Robert Lorton.

But poor Lord Robert, in pursuance of his fatal birthright of younger brotherhood, had already undergone more than one matrimonial crisis of this trying description, and was growing an experienced tactician against the allied forces of his female adversaries. He had long since discovered that it was utterly useless to engage his light-headed, but true-hearted wife, in the affray, and that his sole reliance must rest upon the machinations of his "dear Charlotte." But even with her he had many difficulties to encounter. He found it an arduous task to tame down her feminine susceptibilities into the moderation essential to political movements — into that calm politeness towards the offenders, which might alone enable him to meet their mischievous advances on an equal footing. In vain did he remind her that it was the fractious insolence of Madame Henriette towards the mistress of Louis XIV. which had procured her duchy and distinction at court; in vain did he urge, that Lisborough, notoriously the most obstinate of men, once roused by any ungracious dealing towards his

reigning princess to say "*I will*," would be thenceforward lost to them for ever!

"God knows it would be a most gratifying event for us both to see the dear duke happily married; but then the daughter of such an *intriguante* as Lady Maria Willingham would at once mar the future happiness of our family circle. No, no — my dear Charlotte; Lisborough must select a kind, amiable, domestic being, such as his sister, or farewell to all comfort at Calmersfield."

"Whereas the Willinghams would fill the house, and engross all the duke's attention with a set of riff-raff foreigners, of whom, in my opinion, we have more than enough as it is. Foreigners are very well in a sprinkling, to enliven a party with all their mopping, and mowing, and grimacing; but what have they to give in return for all the trouble we lavish upon them, even should we ever chance to visit their own beggarly castles of desolation? — Heaven grant *us* a sister-in-law, my dear Robert, who has been respectably educated in England, in the midst of respectable English connections."

"To effect which most desirable consummation, let me implore you, Charlotte, to imitate my courtesy towards these Willinghams. I often prevent Lisborough from dancing with Miss Claudia by the assiduity with which I claim her hand myself — and she dare not refuse me. Now, it is *your* cue, dearest Lady G., to affect a violent friendship for them all. Insist upon driving and walking, on all occasions, with Miss Willingham, and there is an end at once of those abominable, those dangerous *tête-à-têtes;* as to all the rest, leave it to my exertions, and I will engage to dislodge the whole tribe from Calmersfield without any permanent mischief."

Lord Robert Lorton's promised manœuvres on this occasion, although extremely efficient, were by no means either new or original: the ancient policy of the borrowed paw and the hot chestnuts availed with him as well as with the cunning ape of the fable. To a "great house" like Calmersfield, a body-guard of toad-eaters forms an inevitable appanage; and the Duke of Lisborough was fortunate in somewhat more than the usual apportionment of *souffre-*

douleurs, doubles, billiard-blocks, living-hunters — younger brothers to talk to the young lady-nieces, cousins, and guests — to fill up the charades and cotillons, and improvisate epigrams for the ponderous albums of the dowagers; — and middle-aged bores, with heads bald without, and pamphlet-stuffed within, to talk politics on public days to the country gentlemen; the said politics being importantly authenticated by incidental allusions to "my friend, the Home Secretary," or "my brother, the late President of the Board of Control." Among these, Lord Robert, as heir-presumptive to the lands and tenements around, was tolerably secure of finding ready instruments for his plans.

Polished into discernment by the whetting-stone of selfish jealousy, the wily brother was in possession of a correct tariff of the degrees of influence maintained by this respectable chorus of followers over the mind of the duke; and he had no hesitation in selecting, for the furtherance of his present purpose, Mr. Bentley, a young clerical dependent, whose lay waistcoats were apt to figure somewhat uncanonically in the hunting-field, and the evening quadrille; and a certain plausible, silver-tongued Pylades of a certain age, whose arm was always at the duke's service to ascend the steps towards White's, and whose white teeth formed a sort of visible echo to his grace's wit, whenever he chanced to wax jocose. Mr. Russell was a remarkably well-bred man; never hazarded a request, and seldom spoke above his breath, or smiled beyond a given angle of satisfaction — a degree of moderation which ensured him a distinguished place in the solemn friendship of the Duke of Lisborough! "Some people think Russell monotonous," his grace was wont to say, "and some call him a bore: but *I* like him; he never takes liberties."

On occasion of the Willingham conspiracy, however, the cautious Russell hazarded an attempt such as he had never perilled on any previous temptation. Approaching the duke in the pauses of a *battue,* and having, as he imagined, wrought him to a favourable mood of audience by a flourishing overture in honour of his grace's favourite Nock, and its unparalleled feats of the morning, he ventured a

slight skirmish against Lady Maria and her daughters. "They were lovely girls, certainly; but *maniérée* — decidedly *maniérée*. They had too much of the jargon of a particular *clique;* and that, perhaps, not of the highest order. For, after all, the Neapolitan set was by no means of the most exclusive class."

"I am thoroughly tired of exclusives," replied the duke, as he stalked away over the stubble. "There is nothing so wearisome as lending an eternal ear to the mere echoes of an echo. Give me a *new* oracle, even if its inspiration be of doubtful authenticity."

Half of this peevish reply being "by the gods dispersed in empty air," Mr. Russell did not immediately discover that he was voting with the minority.

"Did you ever happen to see the caricature," he persisted, "which Lancaster circulated at Paris, of Lady Maria Willingham in the character of *La Vedova* something or other, out of one of Goldoni's comedies? with her daughters represented as——"

"I have *not* seen it yet. But Claudia was mentioning it to me last night, and promised to get it for me to complete my set of Lancaster's sketches — his domestic treacheries as *I* call them. I detest his system altogether, and I have determined that nothing shall induce me to re-admit him within my doors."

A tremendous dilation of the nostrils — an unfailing demonstration of Lisborough ire — now convinced Mr. Russell that he had missed his mark. Nay, so enormous a proportion of toads were administered by the duke to his digestion, during the remainder of the day, that even *his* patient appetite turned restive. On the following morning, Mr. Russell's well-packed phaeton and well-furred valet drew up beneath the portico of Calmersfield; and he, to whom the remote prospect of contingent ejection from its hospitalities, in case of a Willingham duchess, had been a sufficient motive for a first attempt at *tracasserie*, found himself compelled to an immediate cession of his bachelor-tenure. Lord Robert, meanwhile, who saw through the whole affair, beheld his departure without one struggle of remorse. He cared not whether the paw of the cat were

reduced to cinders; saving as a horrible thermometer evidence of the fury of the Lisborough furnace.

The clerical dandy was the next victim destined by the merciless Lord Robert to encounter the perils of the Willingham pitfall; and poor Bentley having being duly primed for mischief by Lady Grayfield's unceasing representations, during two rainy mornings, of the poverty of Lady Maria's innumerable connections, as well as of the large proportion thereof destined to wrestle with the ills of life in surplices and black coats, he rushed fearlessly to the ordeal. During the sleepless nights, or night-mared repose, following those days of atmospheric moisture, his mind's eye had rested upon the identical parochial church of the county of D. which he had long pre-appropriated as his own; while his mind's ear became deafened into horror, by the reading-in of a Willingham or a De Vesci. He became desperate; and, like other desperate men, urged on the failure of his own fortunes.

Much has been said respecting the treasons hatched in female society during the solitary hour abandoned to their debates between dinner and coffee; but more, far more, might be added touching the reprisals practised by mankind, their natural enemy, in that fatal half-hour which succeeds the arrival of the groom of the chambers and his wax-lights. Scarcely has the last "good night" sounded in the last anteroom — scarcely has the fair viscountess, in her dressing-room, abandoned her perfumed locks to the delicate fingers of her French maid, and the worthy viscount in the saloon beneath esconced himself in a Skelmersdale chair, with a copy of the last Edinburgh Review in his hands — when every woman of the party, who chances to possess neither father, brother, husband, nor acknowledged lover, among the group of loungers retaining possession of the saloon, falls successively under the lash, and is finally sacrificed to the merciless scandal of their ill-nature.

"How very well the Miss Willinghams waltz," observed Mr. Ducie, a good-natured and gentlemanlike young Oxonian. "A cousin of theirs, a Christchurch man and old Etonian, who is a great friend of mine, told me they

were considered the best dancers in Paris; and they at least excel any thing one sees at Almack's."

"Yes! quite *figurantes,* as you observe," said Bentley, delighted with the cue. "Eleanor, failing a better vocation, would make an admirable Columbine, and Claudia——"

The duke, who was drinking a glass of iced water, stopped short and investigated the hapless speaker from head to foot. "Well, Bentley, pray proceed. You are so admirable a judge of *les usages du grand monde* — so versed in *le manuel des bienséances* — so exquisite a critic of female accomplishments — pray proceed. What of Miss Willingham and her waltzing?"

Bentley, who was out of sight of the dilated nostril, and not sufficiently acquainted with the vocal intonations of Lisborough fury to discover that the duke was boiling with indignation, simply enough complied with the request.

"Why, as to Claudia Willingham and her waltzing, my lord, I must fairly avow that I should be very sorry to see a wife or sister of my own put forth the same attractions in a similar manner. '*Il y a des plaisirs si doux qu'ils nous sont défendus,*' said La Bruyère. Now I will just show you the lovely Claudia's notion of pleasure, and notion of decency." And seizing Sir William Vavasor, a remarkably shy young man, round the waist, he commenced an extravagant mimicry of Miss Willingham's style of dancing, perverted into a tone of voluptuous freedom, which the struggles of his reluctant and involuntary partner rendered still more ridiculous.

"Admirable!" exclaimed the duke, his eyes flashing fire as he spoke, while he strove to attract the attention of the whole party to the scene. "My friend here is really *impayable!* Not satisfied with assuring you, gentlemen, that he would not accept Lady Maria Willingham's daughter as a Mrs. Bentley, in any shape — (poor girl! I trust no malicious person will petrify her by the intelligence!) — not satisfied with reprobating a lady, one of my most esteemed Calmersfield guests, as vulgar and indiscreet, he literally presumes to adventure the chastisement of

archbishop, bishop, and the diocese at large, by exhibiting in his own person all the indecent contortions of some degraded opera dancer. My good Bentley, I trust you may render your contrition available to the dean and chapter at ——; but you will find it difficult to excuse yourself to *me* for insulting my female friends in my presence."

The duke took a candle from the chiffonier and stalked out of the room; a movement of dignity which was followed by the ominous silence of the rest of the party. Those who had been reading, looked up from their books contemptuously at the disconcerted Bentley — compassionately at the despairing Lord Robert. The young men shrugged their shoulders as they adjourned to the billiard-room; and the elder ones hastened up stairs, that they might gossip with their wives over the promised change in the politics of Calmersfield. Mr. Ducie alone had courage to observe aloud, "The Duke of Lisborough in love!—so much the better. A pretty and agreeable duchess will be a great addition to the neighbourhood."

Meanwhile, having counselled the unhappy Bentley to pack up his portmanteau, and avoid the angry aspect of the morrow's breakfast-table, Lord Robert Lorton sought refuge from his woes in the sympathy of Lady Grayfield's dressing-room.

"It is all over, Charlotte! the thing is quite irremediable. Lisborough is evidently engaged to that artificial, hollow, odious girl. Poor little Robert!"

"Are you quite certain?"

"Oh! he has committed himself by so vehement a defence of his idol, that I have every reason to believe them engaged. I give up the case as hopeless."

"Retreat ensures defeat. No, no! take nothing for granted — do not despair — fight on to the last gasp. Trust to me to second your efforts; and if we do not foil the Willinghams at last, why — 'I will burn my crutch.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

J'ai fait en peu de tems d'assez belles conquêtes,
Je pourrois me vanter de fortunes honnêtes;
Et nous sommes courus de plus d'une beauté,
Qui pourroient de tout autre enfler la vanité. VOLTAIRE.

IT is astonishing with what velocity, according to the amiable modification of modern society, incidents and opinions are made to travel to the knowledge of persons, for whose ears, of all others, they were the least intended. Before noon on the following day, Lady Maria Willingham was perfectly acquainted with every domestic fact preceding the departure of Messrs. Russell and Bentley. But on this occasion the treachery of the clandestine informant was less flagrant than is commonly the case.

Lady Robert Lorton enjoyed too keenly the discomfiture of an interested manœuvre of any kind, to care whose character was compromised by its detection, or to wish to preserve the intelligence for her solitary amusement; and no sooner had her dispirited lord mounted his hack to ride to covert, than she sent for Eleanor to share her chocolate in her dressing-room; where, without exaggeration or reserve, she proceeded to detail the whole story. "But remember," added she, in conclusion,—"remember my warning, and do not let Claudia order her *trousseau* on the strength of the duke's passing enthusiasm — for *passing*, believe me, it really is. I have seen him in love and out of love six dozen times; his heart is worn so threadbare with the mean adulation of young ladies and their mammas, that he has learned to mistrust himself and them. He gives himself up to a momentary intoxication, only to reassume a still more frigid sobriety; and were your sister, for whom last night he put lance in rest and was eager to engage in a crusade, to appear to-day at dinner in an ugly gown, or with her hair in ringlets, farewell to all Lisborough's sentiment. It would not cost him a tear were she to be impaled to-morrow at sunrise."

The fact and the comment were simultaneously com-

municated by Eleanor to her mother. But Lady Maria was either too much elated by the duke's eager defence of her daughter, or was too habitually on her guard against deception, to look upon Lady Robert's qualifying notes on the tale as any thing more than an artful feint. Cunning people are apt to see so much more than the truth, that they regard the actual visage as a mask, and expose themselves accordingly.

Nor did the events of the evening tend to diminish her fallacious self-congratulation. Lord Robert Lorton returned from the hunting field with a visage lengthened like that of a prime minister who has divided on a minority; he was, in fact, at the lowest ebb of despair, touching the matrimonial tendencies of his brother.

The covert of an English *rendezvous de chasse* has been christened, not unaptly, "the coffee-room;" there is scarcely a hunting county in which the forthcoming deaths and marriages, politics and scandal, are elsewhere manufactured. Now Lord Robert, who had unfortunately lingered in his Calmersfield dressing-room for the purpose of unfolding his budget of grievances to his lady, had arrived so late at the appointed spot, that the Russell and Bentley history had preceded his hack; and before he had time to reach his groom and sleek hunter, twenty different county voices had congratulated him upon the approaching nuptials of the Duke of Lisborough. Vainly did he attempt to escape — to turn a deaf ear to their insinuations — to interest himself with the huntsman and kennel politics: his friends readily perceived that he was agonised even unto martyrdom, and would not spare him a single sentence of their rapture!

Poor Lady Maria pondered all these things in her heart till she was well nigh demented! All dinner-time she fancied that the Duke would whisper his proposals in the course of a cotillon or a game of *écarté;* but she was disappointed. She then flattered herself that his grace would demand a private audience when she retired for the night; and again she was disappointed! *N'importe!* — he had very significantly expressed his intention of breakfasting with them previous to their departure on the following

morning; and as this was many hours before the *levée en masse* of the Calmersfield guests, there could be little doubt that he would seize on that auspicious moment for his declaration. But, alas! just as the coffee and dry toast were smoking in his hand, in rushed Lady Robert in her *déshabille* of the night! declaring she would see the last of her dearest Eleanor, and placing herself with the greatest *naïveté* between Claudia and the Duke of Lisborough. Lady Maria could willingly have boiled her to death in the hissing coffee-pot!

The post-horses were punctual, and the Willinghams were compelled to avow themselves ready; yet not one word verging upon a proposal had escaped the lips of his grace. The travelling carriage rolled with barbarous rapidity along the Macadamised roads of Calmersfield Park, and poor Claudia's bosom began to heave with suppressed sobs. At present, however, Lady Maria saw no cause for despair. Lady Robert's *mal-à-propos* arrival was accused as the origin of all the evil, and as a premeditated piece of mischief; and they might still look forward to the arrival of the post — that second providence which, like its prototype,

Sends letters to some wretch's aid!

On the strength of this forlorn hope, poor Claudia, who had travelled down bodkin, was ensconced in a comfortable corner of the carriage as a duchess-expectant; and when they paused for the night, Lady Maria — the tactician — not only called her "her dearest child," but for the first time in her life was singularly curious touching the airing of her bed.

It must be owned that on their arrival at home, the lodging house in Seymour Street wore a miserably lugubrious appearance, after the gilded saloons of Calmersfield; and that the "tough and scorched mutton" became at least as distasteful to their palates as after their first estrangement from the *cotelettes* and *salmis* of Paris. There is a vulgarity of sound and scent inseparable from a small house and small establishment, which her (future) grace found at the present moment extremely repulsive to her nerves; and

she began to listen with yet more feverish eagerness for the bi-sonorous matin knock, which excites so interesting a sensation in London among all persons correspondentially inclined. At length, after an interval of six or seven endless days, a frank from Calmersfield — "*Free* — Lisborough"—was placed upon the breakfast-table; and, as it was addressed to Miss Willingham, Claudia, without a pause, and with a beating heart, tore open the envelope! A voluminous enclosure fell to the ground! Lady Maria grew pale and Eleanor red, with the intensity of their emotion; nor dared they hazard a single comment until Claudia, bursting into tears and tossing the epistle into her sister's lap, exclaimed, "Take it, Nelly!—'Tis only a bundle of embroidery patterns from that odious Lady Robert Lorton."

Lady Maria, unpossessed of a single spark of generosity of mind, instead of sympathising with her daughter's disappointment, began to vent the expression of her own in a thousand bitter sarcasms; taxing the two girls with the failure of her favourite scheme, and straightway charging them with having formed it themselves, and on the most absurd premises. In a day or two, however, the duke himself arrived in town, and all her expectations were revived by the sight of a card for the first ball at Lisborough House. From that moment nothing could be too good for Claudia; and growing suddenly discontented with all their Parisian finery, Lady Maria ventured on an order for three splendid new dresses to Triaud; an order, which, by the by, before the day was over, she contrived by various hints and suggestions to fasten as a present upon her poor old uncle, General de Vesci!

Meanwhile Mr. Russell had taken up his snug abode in his Albany Chambesr for the season; and whereas, among the numerous dowager-houses and dinner-houses, where he was in a manner an habitual guest, and apparently as inevitable to the turbot as its lobster-sauce and cucumber, that of the Duke of Lisborough formed a highly important and agreeable addition, he felt himself deeply aggrieved by the premature abridgment of his holyday visit to Calmersfield, and cruelly menaced by the matrimonial projects of its noble proprietor.

Especially attached to the bachelor *état major* of his grace, he had found it extremely convenient, on many occasions, to accept a corner of his carriage to Paris, and a *pied à terre* in his apartments in the Place Vendome; and at Baden and Spa he had more than once achieved the genuine honours of European vogue, by forming part of the Lisborough party. He was well aware that the distinguished favour with which he was received at the mansions of half the Lord A.s and B.s and C.s of the peerage, on five days of the week, borrowed its cordiality from the certainty that he had formed part of the thrice hallowed circle of Lisborough House on the other two;—that his scandal was looked upon as an authentic echo, and his political intelligence as a dawning truth, because emanating from that fountain head of fashionable glory. And to resign all this! to find himself degraded into a mere independent, respectable Mr. Russell, with two thousand a year and a wig, was more than he could think upon with common patience. He was certain that Claudia did not like him;—that, being older than the duke, she would regard him as likely to maintain his grace in all his fidgety old-bachelor ways, and to vote for the exile of the loves and and graces from their little circle. Already he imagined himself compelled to cede his place at table as an *habitué* of the house, to some young hussar viscount, flaunting with raven mustachios; already he saw himself dislodged from his long-tenanted suite at Calmersfield, in favour of some incipient baronet-witling from White's:—and as to Paris or Pisa, the future continental excursions of the Lisboroughs, would of course be shared by the coronetted or landed interest—by young heirs affording the promise of a good match to the duchess's younger sisters.

Unhappy Mr. Russell! after cogitating himself into a near approach towards a fit of the jaundice, he resolved, with most heroic energy, that the field should not be lost for lack of defence; so stepping into his phaeton, he contrived, in the course of thirteen morning visits, systematically selected among the most gossiping widows and maidens of his acquaintance, to spread a report of the Duke of Lisborough's ensuing marriage with Claudia Willingham.

He was a sufficiently experienced tactician to be aware that a premature alarum of this description, sounded in the ear of the public, is an almost peremptory bar against the consummation of the event.

On this occasion, indeed, the London public had nothing to say in reply. With all its schoolboy partiality for negation—all its terrier-like tendency to a snarl—it could find neither argument nor motive against the alliance. Lady Maria Willingham was forgotten in London society; her daughters were at present unknown; and as she had been careful to inscribe their arrival ["In Seymour Street from CALMERSFIELD PARK"] among the locomotive and most mendacious records of the Morning Post, the world could form no reasonable conjecture against the probability of the case.

By the result of this little manœuvre, however, poor Lady Maria became thoroughly mystified in her turn. She found herself suddenly elevated to the highest honours of fashionable popularity; smothered by the sudden caresses of every human thing boasting the most distant consanguinity to the houses of De Vesci or Lorimer, and overwhelmed by successive showers of visiting and invitation cards from all the duchesses, marchionesses, countesses, viscountesses, and baronesses, to whom she had ever been allied through the social link of a formal bow or courtesy. She was amazed to find how much every body loved her, and how deep was the anxiety of all her former acquaintance to become introduced to her charming daughters.

"My dear Eleanor," she exclaimed, "how fortunate that I resolved to settle in London. We have not a single day disengaged for three weeks to come; and I see no chance of our being obliged to dine at home during the whole of the season. As to horses, Lady Dynevour insists upon my using hers, as if they were my own, and my uncle assures me, that at his club he is pestered to death by applications for an introduction here. By the way, my dear girls, in all this success, you must not neglect your aunt, De Vesci; although she is never more than half awake, and might be easily persuaded that you have been sitting with her an hour every day since you came to town, yet your uncle is

very acute about such matters, and very tenacious that every attention should be paid to Mrs. de Vesci."

"Yes! he hinted to me yesterday that we were grown very fine at Calmersfield; and that we had not dined in Portman Square since our return," said Claudia.

"Who *can* dine there?" exclaimed Eleanor; "nothing but a salamander could be nourished without excruciation, upon that eternal series of mulligatawney, currie, cabobs, cayenne, and preserved ginger. My uncle's bill of fare positively requires one's throat to be Macadamised."

"Oh, that might easily be remedied by anticipating with a *bouillon*."

"Yes, dear mamma," said Claudia. "But the society —the odious set of men one meets there! What could neutralise the horrors of the De Vesci circle?"

"My dear, your uncle cannot get rid of his government-house ways. He cannot yet divest himself of the idea that he is the representative of majesty. He shakes hands with all his guests by way of being affable, and addresses all his morning visiters with, 'I trust you will take your dinner here to-day.'—*Take your dinner!* How thoroughly colonial!"

"And fortunately these morning visiters of his are exclusively wretched denizens of the army and navy list—atrocious monsters belonging to the commissariat—or official *animalculi;* so that he has no chance of finding them pre-engaged. At seven o'clock the whole congregation of beasts throngs back to the De Vesci ark."

"Very true, my dear. But although the guests in Portman Square are persons whom it is your duty to cut if you meet them the next morning, remember, Eleanor, that your uncle has ten thousand a year still unsettled, and has no relations nearer than ourselves. So go and put on your hat, and enquire after Mrs. de Vesci."

For this time, however, they were redeemed from the impending calamity, by the arrival of Mary Willingham "on hospitable thoughts intent." Sir Joseph, having caught a remote whisper of Claudia's approaching advancement, had become suddenly impressed with the urgent necessity of inviting his sister-in-law and nieces to a family

dinner; and as Sophia and himself were enduring the agonies of the annual influenza, inevitable in London to April and east winds, he had despatched his daughter with all the excuses and compliments he could muster between the pauses of his ipecacuanha lozenges. Mary, however, proved an admirable ambassadress; for, instead of these formal civilities, she graced her errand with so earnest an expression of pleasure at seeing her cousins, and so inimitable a blush of cordiality, that no one could doubt her regret on finding them already bespoken. Lady Maria, indeed, howbeit she excused herself with courtesy, was secretly indignant that she had been supposed to be at the command of an *impromptu* invitation. She felt that her day of "family dinners" was over; and that the tide of fashion now flowing in her favour, would land her high and dry among vessels of far greater magnitude than a paltry provincial, ex-clerical, Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham.

"I am sorry to find Mr. Willingham has returned to Oxford," observed Lady Maria to her niece. "It is so many years since I have seen him, that I am becoming very anxious to renew our acquaintance."

"Charles went with us to visit Minnie previous to his departure, and regretted to learn from her that the length of your stay at Calmersfield would deprive him of the pleasure of being presented to you for some time."

"By the way, Mary," observed Eleanor, "your brother's bosom friend was of the party, and one of its most agreeable members."

"Mr. Lorimer is very lively — has very great and varied talents," replied Mary Willingham, blushing still deeper than before.

"Lorimer! — Mr. Lorimer! — you must surely be speaking of one of our own cousins, while *I* was alluding to a Mr. Ducie."

"Mr. Ducie is only a schoolfellow of Charles's; Frederick Lorimer is his dearest and most intimate friend. I conceived that you must be aware of the fact, as I have always understood him to be nearly related to Lady Maria: he is Lord Lorimer's second son."

"Oh! we never plead guilty to a relationship to younger

sons," replied Eleanor, laughing. "It does not answer to extend one's connections below the heir apparent; otherwise we might incur the stigma of being seen with a Mr. John or a Mr. William for a partner, an infamy scarcely inferior to that of the '*Travaux Forcés*' of the branding-iron."

Mary saw that her cousin intended to be witty, and rewarded the effort with an obliging smile; but she was utterly in the dark as to Eleanor's meaning. Lady Maria, who had been diligently inditing a flummering note of apology to Lady Willingham, now came forward with her enquiries.

"I think I heard you mention a son of my cousin Lord Lorimer's, Mary; what is he like, and what are his pretensions? — Is he a rising young man?"

"I scarcely know how to answer you," replied her niece, timidly. "Mr. Lorimer is remarkably handsome, and distinguished himself very much at Eton; but Lord Lorimer, who has an elder son in parliament, and a younger one who is intended for the church, has decided that he cannot afford to give Frederick an university education, and Mr. Lorimer is sentenced to finish *his* at some college on the Continent."

"So much the better! — he will escape being stupified with the classics and mathematics, and all such unavailable learned lumber; and will acquire what Jouy calls '*les talens utils*' — music, dancing, languages, and fencing. I predict that this boy will become the most civilised of his family — who are *vieille-cour* people, and stupid enough. Eleanor! remind me when I call on Lady Lorimer to enquire about this son Frederick of hers."

"At present," observed Mary, "Mr. Lorimer appears to have very little genius for '*les talens utils*;' he is almost as grave as my brother, who is almost as dull as myself," she continued, smiling, as she addressed her adieus to her cousins. "But I hope you will visit us more frequently, and assist in polishing and enlivening us both."

"Really that girl is not so frightful, after all," observed Claudia, who was arranging her own hair in a little mirror insinuated into the lid of her work-box.

"Not frightful, my dear! — she is marked with the small-pox."

"So slightly, that it is scarcely perceptible."

"And then," said Eleanor, "her teeth are so exquisitely beautiful, that her smile quite illuminates her countenance. I wonder if her brother is like her."

"He *was* the most miserable, meagre, yellow boy in nature," exclaimed Lady Maria, peevishly. "I have never seen him since I lost my poor dear Claude! (by no possible chance did she ever revert thus lamentingly to the death of her husband,) and I hate the very thoughts of him. I always regard Charles Willingham as the usurper of my son's rights."

"You must marry him to Minnie," said Eleanor, "some six or seven years hence, and so restore Heddeston to the right line."

"Oh, my dear child," exclaimed the tenderest of mothers, "for the love of pity, do not remind me that I have a third daughter to renew my martyrdom of chaperonage; at all events, let me dispose of you both before I am obliged to form any plans on Minnie's account. When my little Claudia here becomes Duchess of Lisborough, she will assist in getting *you*, Eleanor, off my hands; and I shall depend upon you *both* to bring out Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham's *protégée* with fitting *éclat*."

"Here is Lady Monteagle come to drive us to Colville's, to order our bouquets for Monday night. Who intends to accompany the tiresome old woman? — Claudia?"

"Oh, no! my dear Eleanor, by no means: I cannot think of allowing Claudia to leave the house while this east wind continues; it is fatal to a fair complexion like hers — besides, the duke might call. And on second thoughts, Eleanor, I will go with you myself; for I must manage to coax the dowager out of her carriage for Lisborough House. The hammercloth has not been put on mine yet; and one would not appear there you know in a horrible hired carriage."

"Oh, you might have left that piece of diplomacy in *my* hands. I can persuade old Monteagle to any thing by

listening to her opodeldoc stories, and her Jeremiades over young Stapylford's wildness."

"Well, good-by, my dear Claudia! Here is a book to amuse you while we are away — those French memoirs which the Comtesse Manfroni lent me at Calmersfield. But put them under the cushion of the sofa, if any one comes in; for I have found them *un peu — un peu — un peu!* And pray, my dear, do not sit too near the fire while you are reading; the glare of sea-coal is as bad for a delicate skin as the east wind. Monday night approaches, Claudia! — and in neglecting your personal attraction, you forfeit all chance to the Duke of Lisborough."

CHAPTER IX.

Combien d'esprit, de bonté de cœur, d'attachement, de services, et de complaisance dans les amis, pour faire en plusieurs années bien moins que ne fait quelquefois en un moment, un beau visage, ou une belle main!

LA BRUYERE.

I TRUST I have contrived to insinuate into the mind of the experienced reader — and what modern novelist is curst with any other? — some suspicion of an existing attachment on the part of the gentle Mary Willingham towards Frederick Lorimer. The attachments of young ladies in general should never be more than *hinted* until sanctioned by banns or a special licence; and Mary's was at present peculiarly entitled to this degree of delicate consideration; being unsolicited — uncertain of return — bestowed on a younger brother, the son of an avaricious and pompous sire — and presenting a tremendous promise of disappointment to the secret projects of her own parents.

The mere existence, indeed, of an unsolicited affection in the bosom of a female of delicacy, is a fact that would be carefully concealed by any other biographer; but for my own part, I feel no scruple in initiating the world into Mary's secret, being morally and demonstratively persuaded, that, from the palace to the cottage, there exists

not throughout England a girl of purer feelings, or of more exquisite womanly modesty. Mr. Lorimer had been from childhood her beloved brother's beloved friend; had spent his holydays on more than one occasion at Heddeston Court; had grown up insensibly from the blue-jacketed schoolboy into the tall stripling of fashion; and no wakening consciousness, no recoil of feeling, had yet prompted her to withdraw from him the confidential appellation of Frederick; or to resent that of Mary from his own lips. She loved him; — but at present she knew it not herself.

Lord Lorimer was a formal, well intentioned, mouthy, frothy man, of the old school. He had married late in life; and accordingly found himself called upon to direct and govern the wild animation of three fine young men, and two giddy young women, at a period of existence when elderly gentlemen are generally fonder of their nightgown and slippers than of the more active paths of society. Had not his lordship entertained a singular degree of predilection for petty authority and minor legislation, he might have divested himself with ease of these uneasy cares of the parental estate; for Lady Lorimer was not only some thirty years his junior, but was equally distinguished by the solidity of her understanding and the excellence of her heart; she was a bright example of womanly virtue throughout the various duties and obligations of her sex. But she was neither addicted to moral harangues, nor prone to dwell with emphasis upon the minutiæ of social dialogue; and Lord Lorimer necessarily regarded her as deficient in acuteness and energy. He persuaded himself that had it not been for his own anxious interposition, his children would have been neither reared nor educated; and that, but for his exertions, his whole household would have fallen into a most lamentable state of disorganisation.

Mr. Lorimer, the heir apparent, unfortunately inheriting his mental and moral qualifications rather from his father than his mother, was somewhat empty and very solemn. He was vain of his birth, his person, and his acquirements; and fully intended to render them all available in the acquirement of still higher honours. Frederick Lorimer, on the contrary, was one of the most unassuming,

cordial, frank-hearted beings in the world. Beyond the wish of being happy and rendering others so, he had not a single earthly desire; he was liable to strong and sudden impressions, but, fortunately for his happiness, they were prompted by the same amiable and disinterested spirit which was the origin of his actions. He had all his mother's goodness of heart; but it was at present unregulated by the sterling common sense that formed the basis of Lady Lorimer's character. The daughters were good-humoured, lively girls; fond of finery and fashion — miserable at the loss of a ball, and enchanted by the adulation of every new partner. Their mother loved them with true maternal tenderness; and strove to moderate their girlish follies with so much judicious kindness, that she never terrified them into reserve or hypocrisy. Lady Lorimer was their most confidential friend; and being the first person admitted on all occasions behind the scenes of their wild plans and vehement attachments, she was enabled to do far more by persuasion than their father by all his pompous authority.

To a woman of this amiable disposition, Mary Willingham's gentle character offered, of course, a far greater attraction than to her daughters; who were rapt into an ecstasy of admiration by the brilliant accomplishments of the more fashionable cousins, and never failed to vent their sarcasms upon the unattractive and ungraceful address of poor Mary. Vainly did Lady Lorimer attempt to equalise their prejudices and qualify their enthusiasm. She too, perhaps, was somewhat partial in her judgment; for with motherly penetration she had already discovered the timid girl's predilection in favour of her own Frederick. A mother is always indulgent towards the attachments created by her offspring; and more particularly towards a disinterested passion for her second son. Now, among the persons who were the most vehement in their sympathy with the reported engagement between Claudia Willingham and the Duke of Lisborough, the Lorimer family in general particularly distinguished themselves. His lordship, who was the cousin of Lady Maria, and a prodigious stickler for the maintenance of a family connection, was

highly gratified by the prospect of such a splendid collateral addition to his family tree. Mr. Lorimer, whose mind was bewildered by borough-interest and laudable parliamentary ambition, already projected nothing less than a junction with the Lisborough party; and the girls out-ecstasied their usual animation, in their triumphant anticipation of bridal balls and unnumbered partners at Lisborough House. Even Lady Lorimer rejoiced. She knew it was the first wish of Lady Maria's worldly heart to form an advantageous establishment for her daughters; and she was always satisfied that other people should be made happy in their own way. Frederick alone remained indifferent on the occasion: he had never yet seen his friend Charles's beautiful cousins; and a *mariage de convenance* was an occurrence claiming no sympathy from his honest bosom. He was destined, however, to alter his opinion on the subject.

It chanced that by some strange miscalculation or oversight on the part of the Miss Lorimers, Lady Lorimer's cards for an assembly had pointed out the express evening selected for the first ball at Lisborough House. His grace, pre-assured of the most fashionable crowd in London, or, to speak more correctly, finding the whole of London society open to his fastidious selection, was always late in his invitations; so that there remained no time for the circulation of a postponement on Lady Lorimer's part. His lordship, her husband, indeed, was indignant at the bare suggestion of such an humiliation. "He flattered himself," he said, "that Lady Lorimer was secure of forming her own distinguished circle, let however many dukes appoint their entertainments for the same evening." He even insinuated a hope that his grace of Lisborough might not find cause to lament *his own* temerity. His daughters began to find their secret consolation in anticipating the accession of brilliancy which the simultaneous ball would confer upon the toilets of their female guests; and Frederick needed no consolation. He had privately determined to slip away "*unknownst*" in the thickest and dullest of his mother's uneventful party, and to be the first to join in the first waltz of the rival festival.

The important night arrived. The candles and sinumbras blazed, the liveries glittered, and the street resounded with oaths and flagellation. A crash of panels, and an unintermitting plunge of irritated steeds, deafened the neighbourhood. In the midst of this noisy overture, Lady Maria and her daughters ascended Lord Lorimer's illuminated staircase, unprepared for the sensation excited by the annunciatory reiteration of their name throughout the moving mass of white satin and diamonds in the crowded suite above. They had very little suspicion of the vehemence with which a thousand disappointed rivals thronged towards the reception-door, to catch the earliest glimpse of the favoured beauty who was about to monopolise the most coveted of British coronets. Lady Maria, indeed, became agreeably conscious of an universal buzz of admiration following their entrance; but this she very naturally attributed to the loveliness of the two *débutantes*, on whose adornment neither labour nor expense had been spared. She discovered with delight that the result was eminently successful; Claudia and Eleanor Willingham were, beyond comparison, the most beautiful girls in the room.

Scarcely had they struggled through the outskirts of the crowd, when ten, twenty, thirty different persons were pleading to Lady Lorimer for an introduction; and among those to whom a continental acquaintance, or an intimacy of "auld lang syne," afforded any plea for familiarity, Lady Maria was quite amazed to find what a very strong anxiety existed to learn how she bore the change of climate — how she liked her new house — how she ate, drank, slept, moved, thought, and felt. Not Shakspeare's Crook-back, after his successful suit to the Lady Anne, could be more smitten with astonishment at the discovery of his own unsuspected attractions. Dinner parties! — she might have dined for five hundred days to come at the expense of the peerage in general. Horses and carriages! — she might have travelled on borrowed wheels to the Cataracts of Upper Egypt, without the expenditure of a single feed of corn. She heard honourable mention made of a long-forgotten bilious fever which had nearly exterminated her in her teens; and it

was astonishing what a number of intimate friends now reminded her of their former visits to the obsolete dampery of Chiswick; — "visits she had probably never heard of, as it appeared a mere matter of ceremony to leave a card."

Lady Maria was wise enough to take things as she found them, without instituting an enquiry into motives and contingencies. It was premature to affect the dignity of offended majesty; and it would be quite time enough to profit by the lavish offers of her profuse congregation of friends, in case of the failure of her mighty matrimonial expectations. She was all courtesy, all bland and smiling gratitude; "to beguile the time," she looked like the time; and was already as affably dignified as though she were mother to all the duchesses of the whole coronation-pageant.

There was one person, at least, in that brilliant assemblage, who was as disinterested in her admiration of Claudia's loveliness, as she was painfully affected by that bestowed from another quarter upon Eleanor's animated graces; and this was the modest daughter of Sir Joseph Willingham.

"I am dying to get near you, Mary!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer, addressing her over the capacious shoulder of a stationary dowager. "I want you to tell me the name of the beautiful creature who kissed her hand to you just now — there! — she is smiling at you still."

"The young lady with the white flowers in her hair?"

"Young lady? vile, frigid distinction! No, no! — the goddess — nymph — fairy queen — what you will — anything but young lady!"

"It is my cousin, Eleanor Willingham."

"Lucky dog that I am, for she is mine also! I will fly to claim my relationship. Or stay, Mary; you who stand in an intermediate degree of consanguinity to both, *you* shall be my mistress of the ceremonies."

"Willingly, if you will lend me your arm to get through the crowd. Mamma is in the midst of a rubber, and I must ask her permission before I leave her side."

But before she could obtain the sanction of the deliberate Lady Willingham, Frederick was gone again. His impatience had carried him towards one of his own sisters, whose services he knew he could command; and Mary, wedged

in between the rubber and the dowager, had to endure the gradual torture of observing his animated advance towards Lady Maria's party; his presentation and flattering reception; his flushed cheek in addressing Eleanor, and her smiling elegance in listening to his irrepressible adulation. By and by, while still immovably clutched in the gripe of the crowd, she saw him present his arm to lead the blushing beauty into the refreshment-room; and as they vanished from her view, the chamber in which she stood became an undistinguishable chaos of glimmering lights and rocking walls; and the conversation around her was generalised into a hollow murmur, like the voice of a chafing sea. During her progressive recovery from this first shock of incipient jealousy, a country neighbour, a Kentish baronet, who had long loved her for the patience with which she endured his profuse gift of tediousness, pressed his services on her acceptance for a similar journey; an offer which Mary, in the restless hope of witnessing the conclusion of the affair, readily accepted. Their progress through the crowded rooms, however, was slow. The provincial baronet was no adept in the polite art of inserting his elbows into the shrinking sides of the stationary matrons; and poor Miss Willingham was much too gentle and too courteous to rush forward through the opposing tides with the insolent defiance of a girl of many seasons.

As she passed through the door at which stood Lady Lorimer, a patient sentinel keeping watch and ward over the interests of her arriving and retreating guests, her pale face attracted the attention of the kind hostess.

"My dear Mary! you are indisposed—exhausted by the heat! Can I get you any thing? or shall I let Lady Willingham know that you are unwell?"

"Thank you, dear madam, I have just quitted mamma. Sir William Wyndham is so good as to take me in search of a glass of cold water; and when I have left this crowded room, I shall be well in a moment."

"Go then, my love! I will not detain you," whispered Lady Lorimer, kindly accompanying her to the head of the stairs, and remaining there a moment to watch her progress. She *had* however detained her; and just as Mary reached

the hall, she experienced the peculiar satisfaction of seeing Frederick Lorimer, hat and cane in hand, escort the well cloaked figure of Eleanor through a file of footmen towards the street — Lady Maria and Claudia having already preceded them to the carriage. Apparently there already existed an excellent understanding between the parties; for having deposited Eleanor, he jumped in afterwards! The footman, in slamming both steps and door, shouted "Lisborough House!" and away they drove in a moment. "After all, Frederick is their cousin!" thought Mary. But the recollection, and the scene, and the relationship altogether, renewed her dizziness, and her urgent inclination for a glass of cold water!

It was the first time poor Mary had ever grieved over her own and her parents' deficiency of *ton*—it was the first time she had ever envied an admission into the enchanted halls of the Duke of Lisborough—it was the first time she had ever become painfully conscious of her own personal inferiority to her favoured cousins! They were sprung from the same parent-stock: in fortunes her destiny rose far above their own; her education and acquirements equalled theirs; her heart and mind raised her immeasurably above their level. Her attire on the present occasion had been richly selected; nor could any reasonable or tangible superiority be alleged in their favour. Yet Mary felt at once that *she* had no business with the ball at Lisborough House; that she had no air of fashion; no currency in the *beau monde* to sanction her admittance; no style to adorn the Galoppe or the Mazurka; no *tournure*, no brilliancy of beauty to fascinate the attention of the mercurial Frederick Lorimer. It was a hopeless case!—and Mary was obliged to have recourse to a second glass of water, before she could nerve her courage to re-encounter the affectionate enquiries of his unsuspecting mother, or to plant herself once more beside the critical interest of the concluding rubber.

But if Mary's emotions were painfully excited by the events of the evening, what was the tremour of Lady Maria's frame, on joining the long line of carriages which heralded their approach to the purlieus of the ducal man-

sion! There is nothing more perplexing both to body and mind than the rocking and jerking motion which accompanies a fashionable progress of this description, and mocks the impatience of the feverish denizens of the crowded carriages. Eleanor, who sympathised feelingly in the agitation of her sister, silently pressed the trembling Claudia's hand; but their mother was too much elated by recent homage, and by the conformation she had received at Lady Lorimer's of the general belief in his grace's attachment to her daughter, to dream of any thing but an approaching triumph, and Claudia's glorious distinction as queen of the ball. She was persuaded that before they left Lisborough Hall that night the proposal would be made, and the strawberry-leaves already budding over the brow of the future duchess.

The gateway was happily navigated, and the circle of the court-yard achieved, amid the unnoticed compliments and witticism of Mr. Lorimer. The marble hall, the vestibule, the laurel-wreathed staircase, the perfumed antechamber were quickly passed; and already at the door of a gallery leading to the blazing ball-room they caught a glimpse of their noble host. Claudia, who was leaning on her sister's arm, trembled as she pressed it to her side: she was almost breathless; for being intimately versed in his grace's habits and demeanour, she discerned in a moment that he had assumed his grandest aspect of dignity to do the honours of his house.

The mechanical groom of the chambers now whisperingly announced the names of "Lady Maria and the Miss Willinghams—Mr. Frederick Lorimer;" but his grace did not advance the breadth of one flower of the Tournay carpet. He gently extended the tip of his hand, gracefully inclined his head, and suffered his lips to express a courteous but listless smile of general welcome. A fresh whisper was breathed in his ear—new guests were arriving, and the Willinghams passed on without further notice.

Eleanor, perceiving that her sister was dreadfully pale, contrived to lead her behind the crowd of the ball-room, and place her on a seat; while Lady Maria, on Mr.

Lorimer's arm, proceeded into the midst of the fray, to conceal her mortification in affected volubility; to fan herself, exclaiming against the heat of the room; and to look anxiously around her for some of her Neapolitan or Calmersfield acquaintance.

But it would not do! Mr. Russell stood bowing and displaying to her, from an awful distance, the double range of his pearly teeth; the re-instated Mr. Bentley, who was flirting to desperation with a highly rouged foreigner, remarkable from her very bare shoulders, gave her the recognition of a familiar nod as she passed; and half a dozen ladyships interrupted their gossipry to lisp, "My dear Lady Maria, how long have you been in town?—what an insufferable crowd!" but no anxiety—no homage—no eager enquiries—no allusion to her charming daughters:—they evidently cared for her as little as if Claudia were already married to a stockbroker, and settled in Bedford Square.

Frederick Lorimer meanwhile, who was utterly unsuspicious of her ladyship's schemes, and their frustration, and who was tolerably unversed in the conventional value of a duke in dowager estimation, calculating his grace of Lisborough's importance rather according to his *battues* and stud of hunters, than to his family diamonds and hereditary precedence, became extremely anxious to get rid of his loquacious companion, in order that he might obtain Eleanor's hand for the first quadrille, preparations for which were now audible from the orchestra. After sundry manœuvres, he managed to settle Lady Maria into an arm chair, and an unavoidable prose with the De Vesci wife of an Irish archbishop; and instantly flew in search of her daughters.

Claudia and Eleanor were now seated in view of the whole room, on either side of Lady Robert Lorton, who was striving to entertain them with her most graceful and affectionate attentions. Although unsuspicious of the full extent of Lady Maria Willingham's presumptuous expectations, she felt convinced that her young friends must have been mortified by the manner of their reception. She had a personal partiality for both, and was, moreover, of too

generous a spirit to bear with patience that *any one's* feelings should be sacrificed to a family manœuvre. But while Frederick was forming his engagements with Eleanor, who declined dancing so early in the evening, Lady Grayfield herself came up to the little group with the utmost cordiality; and relaxing from her usual habits of dignity, insisted that Claudia should take her arm, and parade the whole suite of state apartments, to which they were now introduced for the first time. Her sister remained with Lady Robert and her new admirer; and as she noticed the affectionate patronage with which Lady Grayfield ushered Claudia through the throng, introducing her to this person and that, and pointing out to her attention the principal objects of *virtù* adorning the saloon, she became satisfied that her ladyship had dismissed all jealous apprehensions from her mind. She saw, in a moment, that Claudia's chance of duchess-ship was over.

In a very few minutes the whole mystery was explained. The burst of Michau's well-accorded band resounded from the gallery, and in a moment the Duke of Lisborough was seen leading the waltz with a very fair, young, timid, simple-looking girl—decidedly English in her air and attire—totally devoid of pretension, and with symptoms of the nursery still clinging to her personal appearance. She danced ill, and appeared embarrassed by the publicity of her situation; yet, when they paused, the duke "hung over her enamoured"—whispered in her ear—and treated her with all those tender distinctions which he had recently bestowed upon Claudia Willingham. The thing was evident enough. She was his last *engouement!*

"Who is that very interesting girl?" enquired Eleanor, assuming an air of candour, and somewhat ungraciously interrupting Lady Robert in her details of a fall from her horse, which she had either *had,* or expected to have, or been apprehensive of having, in the Park that morning.

"Which interesting girl?—I am looking upon a legion of angels in blonde and white satin."

"With whom the Duke of Lisborough is dancing?"

"Let me see—let me see; who has he selected for his partner?" said Lady Robert, lifting her glass to her

listless eye, and advancing her graceful head through an interstice of the crowd. "Oh, that is Lady Anastasia Burgoyne, a niece of the late Lord Grayfield's. Extremes meet, you know, my dear Eleanor: by which rule Lisborough—having been in love last week with your sister, and her tact, and elegance, and accomplishments—is just now desperately captivated by yonder little ladyship's girlish *niaiserie*, which *he* chooses to call *naïveté*. He talks about her uncontaminated mind and beautiful simplicity, and the charm of being a first object of attachment to such a spotless heart!"

"And what says our friend, Lady Grayfield, to all this?" enquired Eleanor, after having ascertained, by a furtive glance, that her new adorer had been tempted from her side by the excitement of the music, and the scene, and the circling waltz.

"Why, I rather suspect that Charlotte cunningly let slip this new quarry in his path, purposely to give a novel impulsion to his feelings."

"She would, then, approve his union with Lady Anastasia?"

"She would approve his union with no one: she chooses herself to play Queen Margaret to his Francis the First. No, no! Lady Anastasia is notoriously engaged to her young cousin, Lord Vallerhurst, or she would not be permitted to whisper unmolested in Lisborough's ear, as she is doing at this very moment."

"*Engaged!*" thought Eleanor; "then, after all, there may yet remain some hope for poor Claudia."

"Last night," resumed Lady Robert Lorton, "at a little impromptu ball at the Ducie's, Charlotte was congratulating me that the duke had formed so safe an attachment; which would preserve him, she said, from other perils. I am pretty sure she alluded to your sister; but I affected not to understand her; and, by way of affronting her and the Burgoynes, who are nearly akin to her late husband, I assured her there was a report at the clubs that Lord Burgoyne had sent over a commission to Torlonia, the banker at Rome—where Lord Vallerhurst is

completing his education — to hire bravos, and waylay him in the Campagna."

"And stiletto him in due process?"

"In order that the old betrothment might not interfere with his silly little daughter's present views of becoming duchess of Lisborough."

"At which insinuation Lady Grayfield laughed, of course?"

"By no means; she looked extremely serious for half an hour; and at length only comforted herself with the reflection that she should be able to manage her own step-niece, Anastasia, far better than a Claudia Willingham. Poor Charlotte! she is pursued by the furies like Orestes — perpetually haunted by the phantom of dear Lisborough's marriage! And now tell me who was that tall, dark-eyed admirer of yours to whom you were so barbarous just now?"

"A second son of Lord Lorimer's. And even with *your* romantic enthusiasm, dearest Lady Robert, I trust you will sanction any degree of barbarity I may put in force against a paltry younger brother."

"Certainly, love! certainly! unless he chance to have a sister as vigilant as Charlotte Grayfield, who will take care that the head of the family never anchors or wrecks himself upon the sunken rock of matrimony."

Mr. Russell, perceiving that the Willingham dynasty was not yet wholly degraded, and that Eleanor appeared to be very high in the graces of the exclusive yet popular Lady Robert Lorton, now approached to tender his tardy compliments of enquiry; to utter his sentimental reminiscences touching the musical *soirées* of Calmersfield, and his anticipations of archery meetings there for the ensuing summer. Even the Duke of Lisborough proved himself to be sensible of the influence of general admiration, by following the outstretched finger of the crowd. Claudia Willingham's loveliness, even with the drawback of an unusual air of languor and vexation, had excited the strongest interest, as she passed through the rooms on Lady Grayfield's arm; and no sooner had he found all the young lordlings of the day crowding around him to solicit the honour of a pre-

sentation to the new beauty, and discovered, by fatal experience, that Lady Anastasia waltzed detestably, and conversed with more ingenuousness than ingenuity, than he condescended to claim the honour of Miss Willingham's hand.

He addressed her, however, neither as a bridegroom nor a lover, but "talked of opera, park, and play," after the most approved fashion of partnership commonplace; and by this conduct poor Claudia was more hurt and more mortified than if he had withdrawn his notice altogether. She might, in that case, have believed him to be offended; — as it was, she could only recognise him as indifferent, or insultingly capricious.

CHAPTER X.

Her love — like violets breathing 'neath a thorn —
Seems but the sweeter for companionship
With aught so dark — so harsh — so cruel! Love
Which, like eastern gums by pilgrims offered
Upon a holy shrine, yields its soft odours
With an expiring breath. MARLOW.

MARY WILLINGHAM, who had already entered her twentieth year, had nevertheless remained guiltless, up to that fatal sixth of May, of all the ordinary manœuvres of young ladies of her age; and unmolested by the sweet sensibilities which render the pillow sleepless, and the common business of life importunate. On returning from Lady Lorimer's party, however, she had somewhat prematurely dismissed her maid — whose care in disposing the satin folds within the wardrobe, and the necklace in the trinket-box, had never before appeared so superfluous — in order that she might moisten her *papillotes* with a few tears; while the officious attendant, who had already ascertained from the footman the care with which Sir William Wyndham had handed her young lady to the carriage, and who,

with waiting-maid sagacity, had immediately discovered her discomposure, retreated to her own aërial dormitory, under the satisfactory conviction that Miss Willingham had returned home with a proposal still echoing in her ears.

Meanwhile, poor Mary wept, even while she blushed at her own tears. She accused herself of a very indecorous weakness in this irrepressible emotion; she reviled herself as mean, envious, and contemptible: and after forming a praiseworthy resolution, to think no more of Frederick Lorimer, and to cherish no unkind feeling against her cousin Eleanor, she retired to rest, and dreamt of him till morning; when she awoke in the hysteric agony of tearing the white wreath from her rival's snowy brows!

Unfortunately, she had to encounter a stormy breakfast-table. Lady Willingham was fretting under the reminiscent afflictions of two lost rubbers of the night before; and Sir Joseph, who had been perusing two descriptive columns in the Morning Post, illustrating the Duke of Lisborough's ball, and enumerating his partners, could scarcely smother his vexation that "the fascinating and lovely Miss Willingham," who had such honourable mention in the recital, was not a daughter of his own. He could not forgive Lady Maria, with her paltry twelve hundred a year — and, moreover, as his own pensioner to a still meaner amount — for having achieved a distinction unpurchaseable by his annual thousands!

Mary perceived their peevishness in a moment; but it only urged her to a double effort in conquering her own secret despondency. She possessed that exquisite art — but no! it was not an *art* — nothing in Mary was an art — that exquisite impulse of nature, which teaches the suggestion of every image and every association most capable of affording pleasure to an auditor. She pointed out to her mother's notice the beautiful flowers — the firstlings of summer, which had been forwarded that morning from the Heddeston conservatory; she asked her father's permission to share his afternoon ride, and proposed a visit to Minnie, as an object for their expedition; and she spoke with such gentle submissiveness, and endured with such

silent forbearance their fractious negatives, that Sir Joseph and his lady rose from their third cup of tea with brows less ruffled, and with hearts less biliously sensitive to the minor woes of life. A thorn still rankled, indeed, in poor Mary's bosom; but she was little accustomed to indulge in pondering over her own personal grievances.

"Here is that tiresome old Lady Monteagle," exclaimed Lady Willingham, as she left the breakfast table. "If dowagers *will* take early airings, at least they might refrain from premature morning visits. Mary, my dear, come with me into the drawing-room: I cannot deny myself, for I am sure she caught a glimpse of my cap."

"I dare say, Lady Monteagle saw my cousin's name among the guests at Lisborough House; and fancying it to be mine, is come to enquire if Stapylford were there."

"Stapylford! You are dreaming; — Mr. Stapylford is at Oxford."

"Nominally, dear mamma. But Charles writes me word he retains his rooms at Mivart's, and runs up to town for all the best *fêtes* and fashionable races. His mother is now confined at home by Lord Stapylford's illness; and I am persuaded she often commissions Lady Monteagle to cross-examine me concerning her son, whose proceedings she imagines we must learn from my brother."

"And bad as those proceedings are, she has nobody but herself to thank for his irregularities. Stapylford has a good disposition, and had he been brought up as Charles has been, might have turned out an honour to his family."

On reaching the drawing-room, they found that the dowager was not unaccompanied. Lady Maria was with her, and began expressing to Mary her extreme regret that her daughters had found themselves too much fatigued by their ball to leave home so early; her own principal motive, indeed, for such an untimely visit had been to enquire after her niece, whom she announced to have been looking very pale and ill the night before.

Lady Willingham, rather startled by this intelligence, fixed her eyes upon her daughter's face, which was now died of so deep a crimson that she abandoned her momen-

tary intention of sending for Sir Henry Halford. Lady Maria's ostensible motive of politeness being thus fairly disposed of, she proceeded, under its screen, to the real business of her singular pre-animation; to discover, namely, whether Lady Willingham purposed attending the drawing-room; a measure which, when she found it had been previously determined, she very strongly recommended. The fact however was, that she had long intended to present her daughters, and had fully intended to borrow Sir Joseph's equipage for the occasion. She was secure of the loan of Lady Monteagle's or Mrs. de Vesci's; but she had persuaded herself that the *family* carriage, bearing the Willingham liveries and arms, would appear more exclusively her own.

But she had still another latent intention; and as soon as the dowager had engaged Lady Willingham's attention with one of her running-pattern monologues upon the costume, equipages, entertainments, habits, and customs of the last century — upon Ranelagh, Garrick, Delpini, Sir Joshua, and the riots of eighty — Lady Maria affected to be fascinated by the beauty and variety of Mary's collection of heaths; and drawing her to the marble table on which they stood, began to require all sorts of botanical explanations.

"And this lovely plant, you say, is the *Erica Latifolia?* — and this the *Gracilis?* My girls were quite vexed, Mary, that they could not procure half an hour's gossip with you; but they are nursing themselves for to-night — Lady Robert Lorton chaperones them both to the opera. Pray let me attempt to decipher the tiny label upon this beautiful plant — 'the *Erica Si-n-ensis.*' Young Lorimer, I find, is an intimate friend and schoolfellow of your brother's? (And you tell me these heaths should only be watered twice or thrice a week?) Pray is he Lord Lorimer's second or third son? — and what sort of a young man is the eldest?"

"Frederick is a second son; and Mr. Lorimer is expected to become a very distinguished man, as I believe I mentioned to you before; he took a brilliant degree, and came into parliament this very session. Independently of

his rank and fortune, he will probably make a great figure in public life."

"I am glad to hear of it; for they are near connections of my own, and a family which I highly respect. Lady Lorimer appears to be a mere good sort of woman; and her husband one of those stately machines of courtly wood, made to do honour to a star and garter. My dear Mary, your conservatory at Heddeston must be considerably increased to display these lovely exotics. But, in fact, it requires the eye of the master, or, rather, the eye of the mistress, to produce any thing creditable in the way of flowers; and in my time we never had a gardener of sufficient science to engage *my* attention in the business. Frederick Lorimer has, of course, no *expectations* beyond his father's interests, and a younger brother's portion?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"There is very often a maternal grandfather, or a bachelor uncle, or an old maiden godmother, who takes pity on those wretched martyrs of the creation; but in that case a double surname generally forewarns one. I thought it augured ill when I heard this young man presented as only Mr. *Frederick* Lorimer. Had *I* been blest, or oppressed, with such a supernumerary appendage as a second son, I certainly would have had him christened Mr. Howard Willingham, or Mr. de Vesci Willingham, by way of helping him through his undeserved misfortunes. It is inflicting an unnecessary degree of infamy upon a poor young man to call him Mr. John, or Mr. Thomas."

Her ladyship again adverted to the stand of heaths, as she made her way back to the scene of dialogue between the dowager and the dummy; and Mary was so utterly unprepared to suspect the existence of artifice, or to imagine the necessity of manœuvring where no field of action courted conquest, that she actually fancied her aunt had been smitten with a genuine admiration of her plants; and immediately proceeded to dismember them of their choicest flowers in order to form a *bouquet* for her cousins' appearance at the Opera.

"What an absurd thing," exclaimed Lady Maria to Lady Monteagle, as they drove back to Seymour Street,

settling the fragrant nosegay in the pocket of the carriage as she spoke; "what a very unnecessary exertion on the part of Lady Willingham to go to the drawing-room! With an ugly and unfashionised daughter, obscure connections, and bad health, I think she might spare herself the attempt; which, after all, will gain her nothing. She has not the least chance of being included in any royal invitation; nor has she any family relationship to keep up, or to maintain her own dignity."

"The Willinghams are a very ancient Kentish family," replied Lady Monteagle, who, being herself a baronet's daughter, rebelled against the suggestion, "and belong to a class which has always been found a main support to the sovereign and the constitution. Charles — my grandson Stapylford's friend — will probably, one day, represent the county."

"Possibly! but they are not going to present *him* at the drawing-room. And as to poor Mary, she is quite a Bodham in countenance and gesture. I should recommend her to marry some clergyman with a good living, within distance of Heddeston; for she will never make a creditable match. She is totally unfit for London society."

"Our neighbour, Sir William Wyndham, has proposed for her twice; and *he* has twenty thousand a year, and the reversion of a peerage."

"Indeed! and she had the imprudence to refuse such an offer! I remember Wyndham Park; I have a very great respect for the family; the present baronet was a charming boy, but I have quite lost sight of him. You must make us acquainted, my dear Lady Monteagle; old neighbours you know should never cease to be friends. The first time we dine in Hereford Street, pray oblige me by persuading Lady Dynevour to invite Sir William Wyndham."

"He has dined with us twice this year, and we never exceed a given number of invitations to the Whig interest. It might look odd in the county, you know; and make people talk. And now, my dear Lady Maria — pray tell

me — you were at Lisborough House last night, and of course saw Stapylford?"

"I do not know Mr. Stapylford, by sight."

"My dear ma'am, he is the constant companion of your nephew."

"I should not know my nephew, were I to meet him in any place of public amusement. Your ladyship forgets how long I have been abroad, and how much young men alter."

"Well, had you chanced to see Montague Stapylford, I think you could not have failed to ask his name. He is certainly the finest young man in town, and the most fascinating; and if he is not ruined, or shot in a duel before he comes of age, I venture to predict that he will turn half the heads in London. It is a grievous thing — a very grievous thing, my dear Lady Maria! — that young man, you know, is heir to an ancient peerage and a clear thirty thousand a year; but he is already in the hands of the Jews; and if his father should die, there can be little doubt that he would be ruined in a month; ay, and break his poor mother's heart into the bargain."

"My dear Lady Monteagle! You see things too much on the dark side! Pray how old is Mr. Stapylford?"

"Just eighteen; but he has been as good or rather as *bad* as his own master these two years past — has already exposed himself in a thousand ways; — indeed I must say, that had it not been for Charles Willingham he would have been already expelled both Eton and Oxford."

"Very much to my nephew's credit."

"Oh! if Charles were not *rather* too much of a saint, and dreadfully ugly, he would be a charming young man. Stapylford has lived so much with me, that they have been brought up together more like neighbours' children than any thing else; but the fact of the matter and the true secret is, that young Willingham has nothing to *gain* by my grandson — wants nothing from Stapylford, you know, my dear Lady Maria: whereas the young men with whom he chiefly associates are considerably older than himself, and look upon him as a sort of natural prey. They negotiate for him with the Jews, because they are aware they

shall profit by the produce of the loan ; — they arrange the purchase of his horses, because they know they shall ride them ; — and urge him to give dinners at the Clarendon, with an eye to the reduction of their own coffee-house bills. Now there is young Tichborne, the Duke of Arlington's nephew, who, to my knowledge, has only an allowance of a hundred and fifty pounds a year ; upon which he keeps five hunters, and indulges in a thousand expensive vices. He is just so much older than Stapylford, and so much favoured in society, as to form his model ; and, by way of gratitude, I suppose, Montague defrays the cost of *his* follies as well as his own."

" Well, well ! my dear Lady Monteagle," replied Lady Maria, with an air of vague abstraction, for she could interest herself in none but her personal distresses ; " all that sort of thing will work its own cure. His father, you know, was very wild till he married Miss Margaret."

" *Till* he married ? Ah ! my dear madam, few people know what my daughter Margaret has had to go through ! She has been a victim to Lord Stapylford's dissipation."

Lady Maria, who had known her for fifteen years as the most fashionable flirt and determined ball-giver in London, tried to look credulous and sympathising.

" A husband on the turf, and half a dozen executions in the house, form a considerable bar to domestic happiness !"

" Half a dozen executions ! why, then, Mr. Stapylford — between his own extravagance and his father's — will come into a very limited inheritance !" exclaimed Lady Maria, in whose mind a remote plan had already begun to form itself on the young Oxonian's account.

" Pardon me, my dear madam ! Montague is in the entail of his uncle Lord Waterville's property ; — to say nothing of any little pittance I may have it in my own power to bequeath him," replied the dowager, swelling with importance. " But here we are in Seymour Street, I protest. I was going to ask you, as this is Saturday and an idle evening, if your ladyship and the young ladies would favour me by taking a cup of tea in Hereford Street ?"

Lady Maria, who had as much taste for the operation called "taking a cup of tea" as for taking a cup of hellebore, was delighted to feel herself handsomely provided with an excuse. "A thousand thanks, dearest Lady Monteagle! you are always so kind and considerate; and nothing would have given the girls so much pleasure as to pass a snug comfortable evening with you. But most unfortunately they have engaged themselves to accompany Lady Robert Lorton to the Opera."

"Humph!" ejaculated the dowager, with a lowering brow. "Lady Robert Lorton! — now you know, my dear Lady Maria, you and I are old neighbours and friends; and I have, therefore, no hesitation in saying a word or two to you in the way of confidential advice. Beware of that Lady Robert Lorton! She is a very — *very* — unsafe companion for your daughters."

"You really alarm me! — any thing affecting her character?"

"Character? Why not exactly; but she is one of the most giddy, inconsiderate, frivolous little creatures in the world! The habits of her house are extravagant beyond all belief, and will render your girls extremely discontented with home. And then, although she does not commit herself by any gross breach of decorum, she has acquired the character, in gentlemen's society, of being so vastly agreeable and fascinating, that we know she must have purchased her popularity by certain sacrifices to a certain extent!"

Lady Maria knew no such thing: but she *did* know that Lady Robert was the successful rival of Lady Stapylford in the *beau monde*, and that she had declined Lady Dynevour's visits as being a bore of unequalled magnitude; and formed her conclusions accordingly.

"How thoughtful — how obliging of you to put me on my guard! Depend on it, my dear Lady Monteagle, I will keep my eye upon all this! My poor unsuspecting girls have taken a prodigious fancy for her; and it would be imprudent to irritate either her or them by a premature rupture: by degrees, however, I shall wean them from her society. Farewell! I shall look in and enquire after

your ladyship's rheumatism to-morrow, in returning from church."

Lady Maria Willingham tripped gaily from the carriage, and flew to her daughters' dressing-room; where, after recounting the ill success of her mission, and the impertinence projected by Lady Willingham of appearing at the drawing-room in her own carriage, she passed full half an hour in demonstrating to them the value of Lady Robert Lorton's acquaintance. "Putting the duke quite out of the question, my dear Claudia — and although Lady Grayfield's plan is a mere feint, I am convinced we shall make nothing of him — but putting the Duke of Lisborough wholly out of the question, I am convinced Lady Robert's friendship will form a most important resource to you. You see, my dears, she has no daughters to interfere with your interests; she is a little giddy woman, whose agreeable society attracts a circle of the best men; and she is wise enough to know that two very pretty lively girls will materially enhance the charm of her *coterie*, without prejudicing her own influence. The sort of men who flirt with married women have nothing to say to young ladies; and regular, heir-apparent, ten thousand a year, domestic men — such as of course you would wish to ally yourselves with — may be found in Lady Robert's circle, although they would never entangle themselves in any silly affair of mere gallantry."

"Lady Robert has written since you have been out, mamma, to beg that Claudia and I will dine with her to-day without ceremony; and, as she has offered to call for us, we have accepted the invitation."

"Quite right—quite right! I will take the opportunity to pay off a bore-debt by dining with the general. Quite right! under all the circumstances it will be extremely creditable to us to be seen on an intimate footing with the duke's sister-in-law: besides, she would scarcely invite you, unless some advantageous men were of the party; and there is no occasion on which a girl may make herself appear to so much advantage in the eyes of a marrying man, as a dinner. In the style of your conversation, my dear girls, always keep in mind the tone which might be supposed to

suit a liberal country household—the tone which might give a man an idea of your being calculated to do justice to the honours of his house, without neglecting his own domestic comfort."

"Yes, mamma!" said Claudia, mildly. "And always to ask *his* opinion instead of giving our own."

"Oh! we are tolerably versed in our lesson," exclaimed Eleanor, half sarcastically. "We always talk of the happiness of our little fireside circle, and the difficulty of tearing ourselves away from home. *Home!*" she reiterated in a bitter tone, gazing round the shabby limits of their little chamber. "But while we are discussing these tactics, we forget that it is time to dress; and if we neglect that important ceremony, all these fine sentiments will turn to very poor account!"

And so saying, she proceeded to entwine Mary Willingham's heath into her glossy black hair; with due deference to Frederick Lorimer's decision in favour of the form of Grecian heads.

CHAPTER XI.

Vous, infidèle, avec votre air sucré,
Vous m'avez fait ce tour prematuré;
De votre cœur l'inconstance est précoce. VOLTAIRE.

LADY ROBERT LORTON's coterie was of a description more rare in London than in Paris; and perhaps more rare in modern Paris than in that of the *ancien régime*. Possessed of a character of elegance and refinement essentially different from the stately splendours of Lisborough House, it was distinguished by a certain tone of freedom and independence wholly untainted by dissoluteness;—by a slight tinge of literary taste utterly distinct from pedantry;—and by a degree of exclusiveness and selection so superior to the common-place affectation of *finery*, that it created no offence even among the excluded. It was formed, in short,

by some half a dozen women of fashion, chiefly married ones — and somewhat more than twice that number of the opposite sex. These were selected neither from their rank, fortune, beauty, nor wisdom, but from a happy and moderate combination of all such qualifications; — or, to define the talismanic requisite for admission in one comprehensive word, they were valued in proportion to their power of being *agreeable*.

Persons of the most eminent virtue are oftentimes extremely tiresome! persons both wise and learned are frequently ill-tempered and peevish in their disposition; and persons distinguished by the length of their parchments — whether of pedigree or rent-roll — are occasionally remarkable from their vulgarity of mind and address. An *agreeable* personage is one incapable of these faults; — one who, if wanting in the primary qualities recorded, is possessed of good gifts which atone for the deficiency. Lady Robert herself was noble, rich, lovely, witty, amiable, and eminently agreeable; and each among her numerous friends, if less *universally* qualified, was endowed with the latter gift, and at least *one* among the former. Even Lord Robert appeared to moderate his faults on entering the magic circle of his home; he was aware that his selfishness would meet with no sympathy or encouragement, and he wisely exerted his better powers to suppress or at least to conceal the defect.

In society of this description, Claudia and Eleanor Willingham found ready acceptance; their beauty, and elegance, and accomplishments were duly appreciated; and as they were cunning enough to keep their pretensions out of sight, they provoked neither envy nor opposition. There was not one of this chosen set who would not have rejoiced at Claudia's union with the Duke of Lisborough; — first, to mortify Lady Grayfield, who was regarded as mean and intractable and narrow-minded; and next, to attach his grace more particularly to their own circle, with all his mighty capabilities of increasing its stock of pleasures and enjoyments. They were well aware of his dulness and solemnity; but then his unique mansion in town — his beautiful country seat and delicious villa — conferred even upon

him the power of being agreeable. His high breeding and good nature were also qualities of no mean account in the calculation.

Lady Robert's dinner-party was confined to two or three men;—not *advantageous* men, as specified by Lady Maria's maternal solicitudes—but middle-aged personages, with a certain income to maintain a position in society, and leave the vulgar cares of life out of sight;—who, from their currency in the fashionable world, had always a fund of novelties to contribute to the joint stock of general discourse, without affecting the odious colloquial displays of what is called a conversation-man;—whose good breeding was powerful to disguise, where it could not repress ill temper;—who were always ready, in short, to amuse and to be amused. Her opera-box was visited, but not crowded, by several of the younger male members of her own coterie; men of rank and fashion and elegance, who came without undue eagerness, and departed without ceremony;—*not* to flirt—not to affect elaborate efforts of wit and gaiety—but to recount their own observations of the day, and to interest themselves in those of Lady Robert Lorton. It was evident, from their ease of mind and manners, that the society to which they belonged was well organised—matched in mouth after the fashion of the hounds in The seus,

Like bells each under each.

The loss of a single member of this little knot of associates must manifestly have become the origin of discord.

"We shall sup with Lady Barringhurst," whispered Lady Robert to her young friends, as they were waiting the arrival of the carriage, shortly after the commencement of the ballet.

"We have not the pleasure of knowing her," replied Eleanor, with some degree of hesitation.

"She saw you last night at the duke's, and begged me to bring you. I mentioned the scheme to Lady Maria, who gave her august consent; and thus I shall have the pleasure of presenting you at once to all my friends."

Arrived at the scene of action in New Norfolk Street,

the Willinghams began to congratulate themselves on the invitation. An elegant but unostentatious supper-table was prepared with about five-and-twenty covers, and the room was soon filled with the *élite* of the *élite* of London. Lady Barringhurst herself was a woman of about thirty; extremely lovely, but singularly calm and undemonstrative in her countenance and address.

"I call her my consolation," said Lady Robert to Eleanor Willingham. "She has one of those happy dispositions which cannot be persuaded that any thing wrong or gloomy exists in the world. She sees every thing on its bright side! Without being insensible or undiscriminating, she is endowed with so gentle a temperament, as to be incapable of suspicion or despondency. Whenever I am cross or unhappy, I contrive to seek Lucy Barringhurst's society; and without boring me with persuasions, or arguments, or harangues, she makes me feel that I am to blame, and puts the whole instrument in tune in half an hour. After this preamble, you will readily believe that her husband and children are the happiest people in the world. Lord Barringhurst is chained to the galley of politics; and being blest with a somewhat clumsy intellect, he is always getting into some public scrape or other, and making himself the badger of the house. Any other man would have been worried into his coffin ten years ago; but Lucy smooths down his ruffled feathers with so gentle and so unostentatious a hand, that he scarcely recognises his misfortunes."

"A charming character!" observed Eleanor, gazing upon Lady Barringhurst's swan-like grace and dazzling fairness, as she glided from friend to friend, breathing to each, with involuntary discrimination, some surprisingly acceptable phrase or comment. "She appears a most lovely and loveable creature." But Eleanor's admiration was secretly lavished rather on the charms of her ladyship's diamond necklace than upon those of her disposition!

"The bright brunette who has just now entered the room," continued Lady Robert, "forms a strange contrast with Lucy's tranquil sweetness. Lady Barringhurst soothes me when I am unhappy;—Mrs. Grandison diverts me when I am dull. She is a living sunbeam—sparkling, and

evanescent—a very meteor of brilliant irregularity; neither her words nor her actions are amenable to calculation; and her indifference to public opinion constantly incurs the stigma of levity. She has the kindest heart in the world; yet her sarcastic wit in fastening upon general follies has often been resented as conveying personal satire. I am rather afraid of her myself; but I confess that no one amuses me half so well. Ah! here is Sir George Wolryche—that newest and best edition of the Scandalous Chronicle. He traduces us all to our very faces, and makes us laugh at caricatures of our individual selves."

"Claudia, I perceive, has met with some of her Calmersfield friends. Is the duke himself a member of your set?"

"Occasionally;—he would bore us if he came often, and *we* should bore *him;* for poor Lisborough is accustomed to a degree of exclusive homage, such as we are very little accustomed to pay to any one. I suspect he is coming to-night; for the set of young men who now surround your sister are the mere pages to our own true knights and esquires; a tribe of younger brothers, who are too poor to be fine-gentlemen-proper, and are therefore fine-gentlemen-reflective. They ape and toady Lisborough, and dine and drive with him accordingly. Henry Mulgrave has a delicious voice, and sings romances;—Sir Comyne Wallace dances like Mercury;—and Lord Cosmo Somerset is the wittiest and readiest of epigrammatists. But stay! I see a new man among them—Mr. Lorimer—your admirer of last night, I protest! I wish you joy, my dear Eleanor; for although I fear he is a mere objectionable, yet it always gives a girl a certain vogue in her first season to have a presentable man of good family dying for love of her."

"Mr. Lorimer, however, appears exceedingly disposed to live; he is at present as animated as your friend, Mrs. Grandison."

"I beg, my dear, that you will reduce him to Iceland moss without further delay. It is a most impertinent thing in a younger brother to look like a thriving suitor. He is coming this way, and I shall go and make my own

recognitions at the other end of the room, in order to leave ample space for the massacre."

Claudia, meanwhile, who was receiving the incense of all the juvenile members of the society, and looking as surpassingly lovely as a beauty, courted and flattered, generally looks, was astonished to perceive that the entrance of the Duke of Lisborough produced little or no sensation in the room; that at Lady Barringhurst's he was only *one of the party!* This singular indifference proceeded from the absence of all manœuvring mammas. From the little coterie, besides herself and her sister, there was but one unmarried woman present; and that one—Lady Barbara Desmond—was herself so superior—so exquisitely the fashion—so pretty, and animated, and distinguished—that she had nothing to gain from his grace's attentions. She had every possible pretension and qualification to be selected as his duchess; and, moreover, it was pretty evident that such a selection would have been requited with contempt by the most elegant and *enjouée* little elf that ever wandered from fairyland! As to Lady Desmond, she was too fond, both of her daughter's society and of her own amusement, to occupy herself with any matrimonial scheming.

Mrs. Grandison, who was eminent for that species of lively *naïveté*, which the old and ugly generally translate into coquetry, soon peremptorily monopolised his grace's attention, and placed him next to herself at supper; but by a fortunate coincidence, Claudia Willingham and Sir Comyne Wallace were stationed exactly opposite; and although the duke knew that *he* was too poor to be a marrying man, he also knew that he was accounted the greatest connoisseur in female beauty among those whose oracles are omniscient in the memorable bay-window in St. James's Street; and that the young baronet was almost as powerful as himself in conferring the immortalities of fashion upon the object of his adoration. Sir Comyne smiled, and the duke became inattentive to Mrs. Grandison's arts;—Sir Comyne sighed, and his grace found himself obliged to swallow a glass of iced maraschino;—Sir Comyne whispered, and Claudia blushed in her turn—and the fastidi-

ous Lisborough was visited by a symptom of jealousy, of rare occurrence to his unsusceptible frame;—that burning thrill through the head, which is instantly followed by a chilly and aguish shiver throughout the whole person. The poor duke was as perplexed as Othello himself!

Unversed in similar casualties—wholly unaccustomed to find the object of *his* choice engrossed by another, Lisborough played but an awkward part in the pageant;—he had recourse to the obsolete and common-place manœuvre of retaliation. But the stars were in combination against him; and on turning towards his other female neighbour, Lady Barbara Desmond, with the intention of a desperate flirtation, such as might prove more alarming to Claudia's pride than his little skirmishes of unmeaning gallantry with Mrs. Grandison, he found the garrison already invested. Her ladyship was not only engrossed by the unobtrusive adulation of the most entertaining of younger brothers, Henry Mulgrave, but received his grace's solemn advances, and ponderous compliments, with an air of the most supercilious indifference. Claudia was avenged!—and she had the spirit to pursue her advantage, by listening, with her sweetest smiles, to the whispered flatteries distilled, on either side, into her ears. She carefully averted her observation from the fickle duke; but she suspected, and with justice, that he was equally dissatisfied with *her*, with Sir Comyne, and with himself.

Frederick Lorimer, in the mean time, had dexterously secured a chair next to that of Eleanor Willingham; and as she had been conducted to the supper-table by Lord Robert Lorton, *he* at least had nothing to fear from a rival.

"Do you often join Lady Barringhurst's parties?" enquired Eleanor.

"This is my first appearance here; and I insist upon it that you bestow your patronage on me, in order that I may appear very lively and agreeable, and be invited again. I have given you out as my cousin; your reputation is, therefore, in some degree implicated in my success."

"I see nothing here to justify any violent effort either on your part or mine. Lady Robert's set of friends is,

at least, ten years too old for us;—no dancing—no music—no animation."

"I have no time to spare for fastidiousness. In a month I shall leave England for a considerable period; and my immediate business is to crowd as much happiness into that space of time as I possibly can. Lady Robert Lorton is your friend;—at her house, and in her little circle, I shall be secure of seeing *you*, and I have consequently no happiness to seek elsewhere."

"To what part of the Continent are you bound? We have friends established in divers countries—can our letters be of any service to you?"

"Do not ask me! I have already forgotten whither I am going. Three nights ago, I could have enlarged surprisingly upon my tour, its views, and intentions; but from last night I date the period of a new existence; and now I remember nothing, but that I am a miserable, hopeless younger brother."

"Your words sound very despondingly; and yet I see nothing but triumph in your countenance."

"Indeed!—how shall I account for the hypocrisy of my face, which does so little justice to my feelings?"

"Allow *me* to unravel the mystery. Your sensations have no twofold power. You are very happy just now. You have an excellent supper before you; your champagne is well iced; the society around you is in good humour; the room is brilliantly lighted, and of a comfortable temperature. What can you desire more? By anticipating the penalties of the steam-packet and the dirty inns you are about to encounter, you would only render yourself uneasy and tiresome; and *I* should only have to remember you as a disagreeable, selfish cousin; and rejoice to see Mr. Frederick Lorimer's name announced in the departure list of the Morning Post."

"Thank you; thank you! I rejoice that you have left me no excuse for being melancholy—I rejoice that you command me to 'live while I live;' for, to say the truth, I have no genius for a gentlemanlike despondency. And now will you tell me where you are going next week; and whether you will dance with me at Almack's, and at Lady Castleville's ball on Thursday?"

"At both, with pleasure. Men under sentence of execution, you know, are always indulged in their few last whims. As you are going away, we must do our best to make you regret England."

General silence was now enjoined; for the celebrated Taafe—a bard whose vocal, and poetic, and satiric powers would singly suffice to ensure his immortality—had been prevailed upon to breathe one of those exquisite melodies which form a distinguishing branch of our national music. This faultless effort was followed by a duet between the poet and Henry Mulgrave; a performance which spoke far more fervently to the feelings of the audience than any laboured professional exhibition; and the little party separated, with the impression of a most delightful evening, to swell the store of their social remembrances.

Mr. Lorimer, enveloped in his mantle, walked homewards with a lighter step than ever wore out the everlasting granite of London; murmuring to himself the last stanza of Mr. Taafe's enchanting ballad; and concealing within his bosom a sprig of heath from Eleanor's nosegay, a relic of poor Mary Willingham's good-natured sacrifice. He was as much in love as a young man in his twenty-first year ought always to be.

CHAPTER XII.

Prenons le maintien d'un homme en place? PICARD.

GENERAL DE VESCI, the opulent uncle of Lady Maria Willingham, was one of those empty, pompous, good-looking, well-intentioned men, who make excellent governors of colonies under the influence of a shrewd secretary and learned judge; provided they have sufficient interest in the cabinet at home to varnish over an occasional blunder; and sufficient temperance of mind to bear with a ministerial reproof or two, conveyed in a private letter.

The general was a worthy, upright man, incapable of an ignoble action; but he had been accustomed for so many years to have his movements and measures suggested to

him by a beetle-browed, quill-in-hand man, whose discourse was strengthened by inexhaustible arguments and precedents, and legal admonitions, that he felt himself exceedingly puzzled on his return to England, after a colonial exile of forty years, to order his own boots or discharge his own butler.

Under these circumstances, it would have been a merciful interposition had the destinies bestowed upon him an active, intelligent, managing wife—such, for instance, as his own niece, Lady Maria. But one of those strange inconsistencies, so prevalent in the assortments of human wedlock, had matched him with one of the most inert, lazy, dozy, amiable nonentities in the world. It was seldom that poor Mrs. de Vesci appeared thoroughly awake; and if such an appurtenance as a mind had originally been allotted to her, she had certainly mislaid it in her childhood, and passed the remainder of her life in learning to dispense with its influence. With her easy chair, however, her fat lap-dog, and her *vinaigrette*, she was as happy as a soulless body can be.

Now this total deficiency of energy was the more remarkable, inasmuch as the sleeping beauty was sprung from a race of human fidgets, who regarded tranquillity, whether moral or physical, as a state of most demoralised stagnation. The Westlands were a very numerous family, who were not only in perpetual motion, but all their movements had an ascending impetus. Place a Westland in the profound darkness of some bucketless well, and you would have found him in ten minutes standing high and dry beside the brink; —to use an expression of that sarcastic traveller, Jefferson Hogg, "they were always knocking their foreheads against the sky." It was "my brother, the commissioner"—"my cousin, the chairman"—"my uncle, the director"—"my nephew, the secretary"—it was Sir Thomas Westland—Sir Robert—Sir Arthur—Sir Hew!—After these explanations, it is unnecessary to add that the Westlands were a Caledonian clan; that they had risen on each others' shoulders; that the commissioner underwrote the director, and the chairman endorsed the secretary. The legion of the French coin, "*Union et Force*," had elevated them into the highest public consideration.

In allying himself with such a family, Major de Vesci—he was then only a poor honourable—had overlooked the temptations of birth and beauty, in favour of those of interest and shrewdness. He felt persuaded that Miss Westland's uncles, cousins, and nephews, would push him on in his profession, and in this he was not disappointed; and that Miss Westland's comely self would prove a stirring, manœuvring, aspiring woman, ready and willing to scold his servants and legislate his affairs. But in this he decidedly reckoned without his hostess. It was fortunate for his love of ease that his rise was sufficiently rapid to afford him the succour of aides-de-camp during the war, and secretaries, clerks, registrars, and particularly privy-councillors, during the piping times of peace. Notwithstanding his connection with the Westland dynasty, government took very good care that he should have neither opportunity nor excuse for acting or judging for himself; but he wore his regimentals on public days with a very good grace; and sat at the head of his table in a manner which proved highly conciliatory to the whole colony.

Like every human thing beside connected with the house of Westland, General de Vesci, without anxiety and without exertion—nay, almost insensibly, found that he had acquired a very handsome fortune by eating currie and drinking salt-petred claret. For forty years these avocations, and the catastrophic curtailment of his military pigtail, had been his only exertions; yet, through some error authorised by the genius of finance, he had become possessed of vested funds to the amount of ten thousand a year. The lieutenant-governor assured him that it was impossible he could have accumulated so large a sum of money, without at the same time acquiring a liver complaint; and having lent, with officious and official cunning, "A Treatise on Blue Pill," to Mrs. de Vesci, the devoted couple soon began to see visions of Cheltenham, and to dream dreams of Portland Place. In process of purser's despatches, the worthy governor's resignation was received and accepted in Downing Street; and Colonel Document, C. B.—the proprietor of the treatise—was appointed to reign in his stead!

On the arrival of "the good teak country-built ship, the Harry Inglis," in the docks, poor General de Vesci, like most colonial exiles of forty years' standing, found that he had outlived all his family and half his contemporaries; and it was not until he had imbibed several ton of the Cheltenham waters, and hailed the return of his niece, Lady Maria, from the Continent, that he could be prevailed upon to bestow his hearty forgiveness upon himself for having followed the crafty Document's advice. Yet even with this solitary scion of his family tree, he did not feel completely satisfied. He had been so long accustomed to the slumberous indolence of eastern ladies, and to the still more somnolent self-extinction of his domestic partner, that he found Lady Maria's Gallic animation fatiguing, and the liveliness of her daughters extremely unbecoming. There were many domestic points, too, which he could not immediately reconcile to his feelings. Lady Maria had never been able to give a very distinct account of the final destination of a certain yellow parrot which he had formerly sent over to his sister-in-law, her dowager parent; — and Claudia and Eleanor had taken the liberty, in his presence, of pronouncing atar of roses to be a plebeian and insupportable perfume!

He was too cordial-hearted, however, to cherish any malice against the offenders; and excepting that he could not bribe them to waste as much time as he desired in his gilded desert in Portman Square, he had very little fault to find with the Willinghams. I have said that he was a tall, showy, fine-looking man; and as many of his droppers-in and habitual diners found it their interest to assure him that his handsome nieces exactly resembled him, he soon grew nearly as fond of them as of himself. As he interfered very little in their personal diversions, and was always prompt to adorn them with a new dress or new necklace for a new *fête*, Claudia and Eleanor were very well satisfied, meanwhile, to repay the general's kindness by walking or riding with him, or by singing Mrs. de Vesci into her habitual evening doze. At length, however, as uncles — and particularly *rich* uncles — will do, he took it into his well-powdered head to grow officious and disagreeable.

It were unjust to allow the responsibility of such a change to rest solely upon his own ex-governatorial shoulders. Although he boasted no longer of secretary, or judge-advocate, to supply him with motives, yet extrinsic influence was not wanting. He had the whole tribe of Westland to prompt him into action; and as they dined in Portman Square often enough to strengthen their collateral connection with the Willinghams, they were sufficiently obliging to inscribe the names of his nieces in their own family catalogue; and to calculate upon Claudia's charms among their own ways and means of rising in the world.

"My dear general," observed Sir Hew Westland, the major-general and K.C.B. of the omniscient gang, "are you aware that all London is talking of a marriage between the Duke of Lisborough and the eldest Miss Willingham?"

"Mere rumour! my dear sir, mere idle rumour, you may rely upon it. My niece Lady Maria has been passing the holydays at Calmersfield Park—an occurrence of no especial moment—since the rank of the De Vesci family, and an ancient alliance with the house of Lorton, absolutely *entitle* her ladyship to association with his grace; and this slight coincidence has been magnified by the gossips of London, and the prying impertinence of the newspapers, into a matrimonial connection."

"Ah!" interrupted Sir Thomas, the director, filling his glass with claret as he spoke, "we know how to receive *your* diplomatic explanation, general. But the fact is, my dear sir, the thing is no longer a mystery; and you must therefore allow me to offer my congratulations."

"It is, at least, a mystery to *me*," rejoined the general pompously; "and if you will interrogate your sister, I think she will satisfactorily confirm my explanation. Annabella, my dear!" elevating his voice with a view to penetrate poor Mrs. de Vesci's impracticable ears; "have you any reason to suppose that either of my nieces is under any sort of matrimonial engagement?"

"My dear, did you speak to me?"

"The general enquires, sister, whether you are aware that Miss Willingham is going to be married to the Duke of Lisborough?"

"I should not be much surprised if she were going to be married to somebody."

"Certainly not, my dear sister. So lovely a girl—what could be more natural?—But what is your *particular* reason for expecting such a thing just now?"

"I beg your pardon."

"What makes you think that Claudia is engaged?" enquired the general, very loud, and somewhat angrily.

"Oh! nothing, my dear, nothing! Only she was here this morning, and I was telling her how very uneasy I was all day yesterday about my Angola cat."

"Well?"

"And she said—I forgot what it was she said—but she did not seem to care the least about poor Minette."

Sir Robert pushed the ponderous decanter impatiently towards his cousin the commissioner, who was busy with a very long pinch of snuff.

"Seriously, my dear De Vesci, were *I* in your place, I should think it my duty to enquire a little into this business. After all, *you* stand, as it were, *in loco parentis* to these young women. Lady Maria is a very estimable person, but it may be doubted whether she have stamina enough to conduct a negotiation of so much delicacy and moment. Women, you know, general—women are too easily swayed by their passions to proceed to business with fitting deliberation;—and considering the importance of an alliance with the Duke of Lisborough, I think it would have been only respectful and becoming on her ladyship's part, had she referred herself, in the first instance, to your opinion."

"And so she does refer herself to her uncle's opinion," drawlingly interrupted Mrs. de Vesci, who was soaking sponge biscuits for her fat lapdog. "It was but yesterday she was consulting him about laying in a stock of East India Madeira; and the general sent her in twelve dozen this morning—didn't you, general?"

"Macclesfield announced half an hour ago, that the candles were lighted in the drawing-room, Annabella," observed the ex-governor emphatically;—so emphatically, that Sir Hew arose and opened the dining-room door for

the egress of his portly cousin's rustling lustring dress; while Mrs. de Vesci, with a wine-glass in one hand, and a collection of almonds for her parrot in the other, rolled herself, as if upon castors, out of the room.

"I certainly consider the matter worth attending to," resumed the general, stretching himself, and considerably relieved by her exit. "Sir Joseph Willingham is a very respectable man. God forbid that I should disparage the intellect of a dignitary of the church and an ancient baronet." (He loved to have a fling at the new-fangled honours of his stupid wife's relations.) "But after all, Sir Joseph Willingham is by no means a man of the world—is a mere provincial; and it is therefore no undue assumption on my part, I trust, to assert that *I* am far better qualified myself to bring an affair of this kind to a crisis."

"Certainly, certainly!—I have very little doubt that a little judicious interference on your part would bring his grace's intentions to a decision."

"I shall give my unbiassed attention to the business," said the general, frowning himself into a reflective air; "for in all probability the Duke of Lisborough is only waiting for some overture from the head of Lady Maria Willingham's family. My nephew, Lord de Vesci, is still in Ireland, and I am therefore authorised in considering myself as *pro tempore* the head of the house."

The conversation now turned upon the high importance of the Lorton family, whether financially or parliamentarily considered; and the duke was praised—as opulent dukes are generally praised—for all those universal minor virtues which can easily be fitted on to every human character. The Westlands decided that his grace was very superior to the ordinary run of young men of the day; and that it would be Miss Willingham's own fault if she did not become, before the close of the season, the liege lady of himself and Lisborough House.

On the following morning, long before the exterior residue of its eggs and French rolls had been removed from the breakfast-table in Seymour Street, the general entered the room with a very admonitory air. He listened impatiently to Lady Maria's account of a dinner at Lord Lori-

mer's the day before; and in the midst of her anticipation of Mrs. Grandison's ball that evening, he burst forth into a preconcerted harangue, admitting of no interruption. So widely, indeed, did its arguments extend—so much did he say of the claims of kindred, of personal affection, family alliances, and his own especial predilection for herself and her daughters—that Lady Maria immediately decided her uncle was come to announce the signature of his will;—and even the girls, who were in sanguine expectation of a morning visit from the Duke of Lisborough, and who were therefore in an agony of anxiety to go and put the finishing stroke to their toilet, judged it advisable to assume a sentimental air, and linger patiently over their coffee-cups.

Words, therefore, are insufficient to depict the consternation which pervaded the countenances of the three, when General de Vesci unexpectedly diverged into the views he had recently imbibed from the Westland clan; setting forth his intentions of immediate interference, and insinuating some trifling displeasure that his opinions on the subject had not been already consulted.

Claudia and Eleanor telegraphed a look of despair across the table, while Lady Maria mildly attempted to moderate the excess of his zeal.

"My dear sir," she exclaimed, "can you for a moment suppose, that had the duke's attentions to my daughter assumed any thing beyond the form of common courtesy, you would have been permitted to remain in ignorance of the affair? Oh, my dear, dear uncle! you must surely be too well persuaded of my poor girl's grateful affection towards you to indulge in such an illusion. The Duke of Lisborough has done no more than pay us ordinary attention in requital of former hospitality;—but the world is *so* jealous—*so* ill-natured!"

"I perceive nothing jealous or ill natured in projecting an alliance between the duke and Miss Willingham."

"*You*, my dear general, you, who know so much of the world—of the great world—cannot fail to recognise that this sort of premature report is almost prohibitory of the event; and that the most delicate forbearance is requisite in conducting an affair, which the interest of so many different persons is leagued to circumvent."

"That is the *very* consideration, my dear Maria, which induces me to come forward at the present juncture. I believe I may say it without compliment to myself, that I, who have so long been engaged in a diplomatic career—I, who have had the responsibilities of government—his majesty's representative government—hanging upon my hands—can pretend to the adjustment of a negotiation of this description far better than even yourself."

"But no *negotiation* has been yet thought of, dear uncle," impatiently interrupted Eleanor.

The general waved an angry negative with his ungloved hand.

"Nor will *ever* be, Miss Eleanor, without some effort on my part. As your nearest male relative, it becomes a duty incumbent on myself to see that no improper trifling in the Duke of Lisborough's conduct throws a slur upon any female connected, however remotely, with the family of De Vesci. I shall therefore take some strong and immediate measure towards an explanation."

Claudia and Eleanor silently hazarded a glance of sympathy towards each other.

"Or perhaps I should acknowledge—for *we* official men"—with a self-important smile—"we official men are not in the habit of hanging fire on such occasions—perhaps I should candidly avow—that I have already taken it."

"Good heavens, sir!" ejaculated the usually impassive Claudia, suddenly rising and clasping her hands, "what *have* you done?"

"And without so much as consulting us," added Eleanor with indignation.

"My dear nieces, I trust I require no suggestion from yourselves, or *any* one, relative to the line of conduct to be pursued on an occasion involving a point of family honour. I have simply done my duty!"

"Well, sir?" faintly enquired Lady Maria. The general drew himself up with an air of considerable dignity. "I have invited the Duke of Lisborough to dinner on the fourth of next month!"

Relieved by this very unexpected announcement, the girls gazed upon each other with a smile of mutual con-

gratulation. Still, although the evil was of a very minor kind, they felt that it *was* an evil. They were well aware that the duke was by no means in the habit of wandering from his own orbit; or rather, that living as the centre of attraction to a little sphere of his own, and possessing the power of commanding pleasure and amusement, according to the suggestion of his personal whims, he seldom placed himself at the mercy of other people's invitations. But regrets were vain—the deed was done; and it only remained for them to qualify, by their own ingenuity, its appalling consequences.

"But, my dear general!" observed Lady Maria, with as much courtesy as she could assume, while boiling with indignation, "your acquaintance in town is at present so very limited—you have as yet taken so little trouble towards the renewal of your former connections, that I cannot conceive how you will ever make out a party to meet the Duke of Lisborough. You must be aware that he confines himself to a very exclusive set."

"In honouring my dinner-table with his presence, he extends it for the occasion to *my* guests, whoever they may be; and I trust they are never of a class to reflect discredit on his grace."

"*Discredit!* oh, dear no, sir! But fashion, you know, my dear uncle, fashion is a most arbitrary, a most peremptory code."

"I conceive, madam, that a certain rank in life is sufficient to elevate one wholly above its influence. Fashion, Lady Maria, may become a badge of distinction to an upstart such as a Mr. Brummell; but I presume to imagine that persons of rank, such as the Duke of Lisborough and General de Vesci, are exempted from so contemptible a tax."

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders, and left the table in despair.

"Besides, your ladyship appears to forget that his grace is as closely my relative as your own."

"I am well aware that there is some remote connection between the Lortons and De Vescis; but *our* acquaintance with the duke arose from frequent meetings on the Continent, where we moved in the same circle."

"*Remote* connection? Surely you are not ignorant that James, the thirteenth Duke of Lisborough, was son to Lord Adolphus Lorton, by Mildred, the daughter of John, fourth Earl of Chesterville, whose grandmother was a De Vesci?—REMOTE connection!—I was explaining the whole affair the other morning at Brookes's to Lord Robert Lorton; by whose air and address, by the way, I was by no means captivated. He has all the coldness and listlessness of the late duke, without any of his graceful dignity. While I was talking to him, there came up a very elegant young man, who requested his lordship to present him to me as a near relative of your late mother, Lady de Vesci's;—a Mr. Lorimer, a very respectful, agreeable, modest young gentleman. He spoke of having recently made your acquaintance; and I invited him to visit me in Portman Square."

"I consider Mr. Frederick Lorimer a very forward person," said Lady Maria pettishly, while Eleanor reseated herself at the table. "I have no idea of younger brothers presuming upon family connection to push themselves into one's society. There is nothing so disadvantageous as to have a parcel of detrimentals loitering and lounging about a house frequented by young ladies of a marrying age. But to return to your dinner, general. *Whom* do you think of inviting to meet the duke?"

"Yourselves, of course; and the ladies of a party once settled, the men become of minor importance. I can easily fill up my table."

"Pardon me, dear sir—the male guests of a dinner-party are by far the most difficult to adjust to the taste of their own sex. To form an unpleasant female acquaintance is an affair of minor moment; but to be forced into collision with a vulgar or obscure man, would be martyrdom to a person so fastidious as the duke."

"I flatter myself Mrs. de Vesci's family is neither vulgar nor obscure. I shall invite all the Westlands."

"Good God! you surely do not think of such a thing! Men who were never dreamt of on the southern side of Oxford Street!"

"Lady Maria Willingham, you forget yourself. Sir

Hew Westland is a distinguished officer in his majesty's service ——"

"Of whom one never hears, except in the newspaper list of a *lévée*—or on occasion of a frame-breaking at Nottingham."

"Sir Thomas Westland, madam, is a director of the Honourable East India Company."

Lady Maria groaned.

"Sir Philip is a banker of considerable eminence, and is, moreover, married to the niece of the late attorney-general."

"My dear uncle," interrupted Eleanor, who was less in awe of the general than either her mother or sister, "what are all these people to the duke? He never heard of them, nor *will* ever hear of them in the course of his existence! Except in such places as Bedford Square or Devonshire Place, the Westland family rank among the nonentities of the earth. Invite them to meet your stockbroker, your solicitor, or your physician, and they will pass for high mightinesses;—their names and designations will maintain them. But in a certain set, to be unknown is to be infamous. The Duke of Lisborough never finds himself among strangers; and he would consider it an affront to be invited among a tribe of Hottentots like the Westlands."

"Upon *my* word, Miss Eleanor ——" the general began.

"Dearest Nelly! how can you be so imprudent?" interrupted Claudia.

"It is much better to speak out, in such a crisis," persisted Eleanor Willingham bluntly. "My uncle's only wish on this occasion is to benefit ourselves; he is not aware of the duke's fastidious and supercilious ways; and it is much more candid to forewarn him of the truth."

General de Vesci, who was really a kind-hearted man, appeared pacified by this explanation, and inclined to treat the whole business jocosely.

"Well—my fair counsellor!—and *you*, who are so well versed in the art and science of dinner-giving—what amendment do *you* suggest? Who, of all my acquaintance, are fine enough to be admitted into our scheme?"

"Oh! you must give mamma *carte blanche*, and she will arrange it all with Mrs. de Vesci."

"In the mean time, you will allow me to learn the names of my future guests."

"Oh! there is the new Neapolitan ambassador, Prince Agostino Sciarrha, on whom you called yesterday. The princess is our particular friend, and a very charming woman. *They*, I am sure, will be delighted to come; and they will bring one of their *attachés*, who is a great *protégé* of the Duke of Lisborough's, the Duca di Villa Armagnano."

The general, who was a great lover of great names, became somewhat appeased by this euphonious promise. "And your relations, the Lorimers, Lady Maria?—Lord Lorimer left his card on me at the beginning of the season, and her ladyship and Mrs. de Vesci have exchanged visits;—only Annabella is so unobservant that she never can be made to distinguish Lady Lorimer from her daughters. How many of the family ought I to include in the invitation?"

"The Lorimers! They are as *mauvais ton* as the Westlands!—They belong to a class of the nobility who are utterly unknown in the fashionable world!—who lend themselves out as stars, to all the vulgar second-rate parties; and affect to be too wise or too good for the *beau monde*, which despises them. If you like, you can invite the eldest son. He lives very little with his own family, and will probably achieve better things;—he is considered a rising young man."

"And Mr. Frederick?"

"A younger brother who is not in parliament, and who neither writes books, nor is considered attached to some leading woman of fashion, is a mere blank," said Lady Maria, angrily. "Pray, sir, spare us the infliction of any such Mr. Johns and Mr. Thomases. You are acquainted with Mr. Russell—Beau Russell, I mean. Ask *him*, and Sir Comyne Wallace, whom I presented to you at the Opera. Old Lord Hopemell is not a bad style of man, although rather out of date;—and I should think the duke would not object to meet Lord Masterton, the ex-governor general, although they differ so widely in politics. But, at all events, sir, you can wait till you re-

ceive the duke's answer;—it is by no means certain at present that he will accept your invitation."

"By heavens! you are all Lisborough mad!" exclaimed the general, closing his snuff-box with an irritable jerk, and taking up his hat in a pet. "I might have invited half the royal family, with a quarter the fuss."

"The royal family! I should think so," reiterated Eleanor flippantly. "Who ever thought of comparing the royal family in point of *fashion* with the duke of Lisborough?"

"Stark mad!" muttered the general, pulling his hat over his brows, and leaving the house. "Poor unfortunate girls! Their residence on the Continent has deprived them of even the moderate portion of understanding they received as their birthright. His grace, in marrying Claudia, will do well to provide strait-waistcoats for the whole family!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Voilà de jeunes gens qui ont fait trop tôt le tour de leur planète.
SENAC DE MEILHAN.

"WHAT did you lose after I left the table last night, Stapylford?" enquired Sir Comyne Wallace of Lord Stapylford's son, who was lounging on the down sofa of his apartment at Mivart's. "Any thing heavy?"

"On my soul! I forget," replied the yawning Stapylford, passing a white hand through his perfumed curls, and crumpling with the other the Morning Post into a toss-ball. "Tichborne!" said he, elevating his drawl to address a particular friend, who, dressed as his *double*, was busily engaged at the breakfast-table, with the wreck of a *pâté de foie gras*. "Tichborne! what did I lose? I saw you booking it all."

"Don't destroy my small relic of appetite by adverting to the subject, there's a worthy fellow. We lost last night—for we played together—more than it is pleasant to think of this morning."

Sir Comyne went to the window, and began to polish Mr. Mivart's plate-glass with the tassel of his cane, by way of concealing a smile. Both, from the active evidence before him, and from his certain knowledge that Tichborne had not a shilling of his own, either to spend or to hazard, he thought it improbable the young gentleman's appetite would suffer on the present occasion.

"Why were you not both at Mrs. Grandison's ball? Your family were all there, Tichborne; and you know, Stapylford, I offered to get you a card."

"Oh, curse balls!" replied the *double*, ringing for a glass of Curaçoa or Scubac to qualify the unctuous *pâté*. "We looked in at the Opera for an hour, and saw all Mrs. Grandison's set in their ball finery; but except Lady Robert Lorton, who was sparkling like an ill-set diamond in a hideous hat, and the two pretty Willinghams, there was nothing to tempt a man to forget himself into the milk-and-water common-place of a ball-room."

"That Lady Barringhurst, your cousin, is a very lovely piece of human nature," said the boy-voluptuary, who was busy with his ball; "shé looks like a swansdown-muff, or my poodle, after he has been washed in milk of roses."

Tichborne echoed the witling with the ready laugh of a *double;* but his cheek was flushed, and his eye sparkled with an angry glance. "And what had you new at Mrs. Grandison's, Wallace?"

"Oh, nothing new. But a thousand old things which might have amused you better than losing your money at Crockford's. In the first place, a supper, the very recollection of which might have superseded the necessity of a further breach upon that ruined *pâté*."

"We did not sup ill at Crocky's," said young Stapylford, swallowing a glass of Scubac with leisurely enjoyment.

"One never does; but having paid for those gratuitous suppers at the rate of a *rouleau* a mouthful, they always give me a fit of indigestion. Now, at Mrs. Grandison's I felt the cost to be at the expense of a rich banker's vanity. I believe they had the President of the Royal

Society to inspect the cooling of the wines—no ice!—it was all a chemical operation;—and the strawberries were brought to table growing in China saucers, that we might hail them in all their horticultural freshness."

"Well imagined!—that Mrs. Grandison is not destitute of genius," observed Tichborne. "But what made *her* give a ball?—it is contrary to the system of her circle."

"Oh! I fancy she is rather breaking out of Lady Robert Lorton's set; she is too vivacious, and not sufficiently well-bred for their indolent easy mode of happiness. She likes a little *tracasserie*—a little mischief to keep her alive; and her present mania is to achieve the legislation of Lisborough House; she wants to get that overgrown baby into leading-strings."

"Absurd! She has all the influence which beauty, and all the enjoyments which money, can give; besides the adoration of a husband who would pave Portland Place with rubies to please her! Why cannot she be satisfied without throwing away her reputation?"

"*La belle Grandison* has a very active spirit, which cannot exist without the exertion of manœuvring. A difficulty to overcome is a great temptation to a genius like hers."

"But where's the difficulty of winning the attentions of a person so fickle as the Duke of Lisborough?"

"None, I grant you;—but to *retain* them?"

"More trouble than they are worth."

"Than *they* are worth. But you omit from the balance the dear delight of giving pain—the pleasure of irritating our lady of the farthingale—the austere Lady Grayfield—and baffling the manœuvres of the lovely Claudia Willingham."

"Or making that simple little daisy, Lady Anastasia Burgoyne, shut up its leaves and die."

"By heavens! it was quite exquisite to see the duke the other night at Lord Monmouth's concert. You know he is a furious amateur, and cannot endure to be flirted with within scrape of an orchestra; so, when Mrs. Grandison grew too kind, and too tiresome, Lisborough went and took refuge behind the skirts of Lady Grayfield's clothing,

by way of not knowing her, and of being shocked at her proceedings."

"The advantage of having a virtuous sister!" exclaimed Sir Comyne. "It is really lucky that the duke has such a buckler of defence against his fair friends; for, upon my soul, it is disgusting to see the manner in which he is invaded on all sides. And yet, faith! I should not dislike playing *Il Turco* for a few weeks, after his grace's fashion —letting all the fair Odalisques come and kiss the dust of my sublime feet. *Your* turn will come soon, Stapylford. When you inherit your uncle's fortune, and put on your coronet, you will find yourself obliged to assume a spiked collar, *à la* bull-dog, to escape being worried."

"I detest women," drawled the youthful Alcibiades, "they are so cursedly selfish. The strongest affection never surmounts *their* egotism, while from *us* they expect every possible sacrifice."

Tichborne laughed heartily, and Sir Comyne Wallace ironically, at this sally.

"You know them, at present, through their worst representatives. I am persuaded, my dear fellow, you never found courage to enter into conversation with any thing in the shape of a lady, except that frightful sister of Charles Willingham's, at Heddeston."

"Whom old Monteagle, my grandmother, seriously advised me to marry! By way of frightening the ancient soul into an apoplexy, I told her I was already engaged to little Minnie, who will never have a shilling——"

"Hush! here comes Lorimer! he is somehow or other connected with those Willinghams. Lorimer, my fine fellow—how are you?"

"Why looks your grace so heavily to-day?" enquired Stapylford.

"Because he is in *dis*grace," said Tichborne, laughing at his own wit. "Its papa has protested a bill—or its mamma——"

"My dear Tichborne," said Frederick Lorimer, sarcastically, "be satisfied with quizzing your own parents; mine must remain my especial property."

"But you have really a most woe-begone and indignant

air," said young Stapylford. "Out with it, man;—swear a little at somebody or other, and you will be better. Who has affronted you?—which of your friends here present is to be your 'friend?' Who stands first to be your second?"

A waiter now entered the room with certain despatches from Mr. Stapylford's head groom to Mr. Tichborne; on the strength of which, having swallowed two consecutive glasses of liqueur, drawn his waistcoat and black stock into their respective and relative positions before the looking-glass, and filled his morocco cigar-case from Stapylford's tin treasury, he announced his intention of proceeding to the stables; where some mysterious operation was going on, which was said by Irish Bob to necessitate his inspection. There was nothing, indeed, particularly degrading to Lord Henry Tichborne's son in the office of stud-groom, which he thus appeared to arrogate to himself:—the horses which bore Mr. Stapylford's name being far more his own property. He rode them all the winter at Melton—all the summer in the Park; and whatever money was won upon them in the course—at Hampton, or Goodwood, or Croxton Park—all found its way into Mr. Tichborne's pocket.

"I am come to enquire whether you have any message to Charles Willingham, or any commands to Oxford at large?" said Lorimer, as soon as the *double* had sworn his way out of the room. "I am off by the mail this evening."

"And what says the fair Eleanor to your scheme of departure?" said Sir Comyne, apparently as much relieved as Frederick Lorimer by the absence of their dear friend's dear friend. "Methought I saw you whispering her somewhat closely in Mrs. Grandison's Abyssinian tent-room last night; and it seemed to me that she turned neither a deaf nor an angry ear."

"What can a wretched younger brother like *myself* find to urge that is likely to win the attention of a lovely girl like *herself*?"

"That which pleases most lovely girls;—that you are madly in love with her; and are hesitating between Prussic acid and oxalic, to put a period to your woes;—

just such trash as I talked the other night to her fair sister Claudia, by way of exasperating that leather-and-prunella automaton, Lisborough; who, by the way, takes the liberty of trifling with women's affections in a manner that often induces me to wish I had a pretty sister of my own, for the prospect of calling him out."

"And yet you jestingly recommend me to trifle in a similar manner with Eleanor Willingham's?"

"*I* recommend any measure in jest? Believe me, my counsels were as grave as if they had been uttered by the Lord Chancellor in the most erudite of all his wigs. I advised no *feigning*, but a simple confession of *feeling* which I knew to exist."

"With a view to obtain some such concession in my turn?—a concession which must inevitably ensure the misery of both!"

"You seem bursting with magnanimity this morning; but you will not, at least, deny the fact of your being desperately in love?"

"Like a fool or a madman! Eleanor is a sort of cousin of mine, although we have never met till lately; and this connection has advanced our intimacy with such miraculous facility, that I have seen her more in ten days than one sees of girls in general during a London month. Knowing that my stay in England was so limited, I felt that I had a right to make it as happy as I could, without calculating that the misery of my residence on the Continent would thereby become increased a thousand fold."

"*Misery?* pho! pho!" exclaimed Stapylford. "Make the best of your way to Paris, and you will forget her in a month."

"You judge me, my dear Stapylford, by your own feelings."

"Not I, by Jupiter!—a week, or even a day, if passed according to my own good liking, would do the business for *me*."

"But, unfortunately, I am bound *not* to Paris, but to Leyden; where I fancy I should find the waters of oblivion more difficult of attainment."

"But I do not understand what takes you to-night to

Oxford, a place which it costs me so much pains and hazard to keep away from. Is it your passion or your prudence — eh! Frederick?"

"Both! — I want to enquire of Charles Willingham, whether his cousin is ever likely to be in possession of a shilling, before I presume to offer her my own younger brother's eighteen-pence! I think it decent, in respect to both our families, that we should make up half-a-crown between us!"

"A considerable waste of time and trouble," observed Stapylford, arranging the *amadou* of his *cigarette*, which Tichborne had politely thrown open on the chiffonier. "Why don't you run away with her at once?"

"Run where — *in* what — *with* what?"

"I will lend you my travelling-carriage; and you can go to Gretna Green first, and Botham's, at Salt Hill, afterwards."

"And the King's Bench in the third place! — But who is to pay the cost of the expedition? — *I* have nothing but my dressing-box and a brace of greyhounds to raise money upon."

"My last loan is not exhausted, notwithstanding my last night's losses; and five hundred are much at your service," said Stapylford, listlessly. "I will give you a draft on my banker, and you can be off this evening."

"My dear Stapylford," exclaimed Lorimer, "you are so accustomed to find Tichborne and Co. dipping into your purse, as if it were their own, that you have forgotten scruples can even exist on such a subject. But Brook Street is not the Rue de la Paix, therefore *I* have no immediate excuse for the annihilation of memory which you predicted just now. *I* cannot contrive to forget that I am a beggar — or a cadet — (synonymous terms, you know) — not for to-day or to-morrow, or till I came of age; but for the remainder of my hang-dog days. You must therefore excuse me from borrowing money which it will remain wholly out of my power to return at any future period; and ——"

"I wish Tichborne were here to extend his ears, eyes, and lungs, at such an extravagant declaration," observed Sir Comyne, in a parenthesis.

" And from running away with a pretty cousin of my own, who deserves a more honourable death than starvation on the Surrey side of the bridges."

" As you please," said Stapylford. " But since you are so economically inclined, let me still recommend you to retain the Oxford journey as the last resource of your despair."

" I have resolved upon speaking to my father before I go abroad; and it will be necessary to provide myself with particulars previous to the explanation."

" A very rational precaution!—but you are going fifty superfluous miles in search of them. I can inform you, on the best authority, that your goddess is as portionless as you can desire. She has a little fairy of a sister living at Heddeston Court, with old Melchisedec Willingham, with whom I have been half in love myself ever since she has been out of leading-strings; and the dowager, my Monteagle grandame, has duly forewarned me every holy-days, 'Montague! Montague! beware how you entangle yourself with that child! Fall in love with her cousin, and welcome!—but Minnie will be a beggar to the end of her days.'"

" Minnie!" exclaimed Lorimer, starting from the sofa on which he had thrown himself in a very lover-like attitude; " is *that* little girl the daughter of Lady Maria? How strange that Eleanor should never mention her?—But now you remind me that, without referring to Melchisedec, as you obligingly denominate Charles Willingham's respected sire, I can gather all the particulars I wish to know from my friend Mary;—I will be off directly to Grosvenor Square."

" But you will find that armadillo, her sententious ladyship, stationed in the drawing-room," said Stapylford.

" Oh, she will be busy reading the Book of Martyrs, or the Pilgrim's Progress, and she never disturbs herself on my account. As Charles's friend, I am looked upon as the friend of the whole house. Or I will persuade Mary to come and walk with me in the square."

" You are a lucky dog to be trusted in *tête-à-tête* walks with young ladies," said Wallace, taking up his hat.

"Melchisedec knows that his daughter and her fifty thousand pounds are as safe with me as with her grandfather," said Lorimer.

"On her *mother*'s side, I believe she never had a grandfather," observed Stapylford. "But she is ugly enough to be safe any where, with any body."

"No strictures on Mary Willingham;—she is the best creature breathing, and I love her like a sister," replied Frederick Lorimer.

"I have a great regard for Mary myself," said Stapylford, extending his finger in adieu, as they were leaving the room; "but I think *I* love her more like my grandmother. My compliments to her, Fred.—but you need not tell her so. And now I must go and see what Tichborne is doing."

"Stapylford is a fine fellow," observed Sir Comyne Wallace to Frederick Lorimer, as they sauntered arm-in-arm up Brook Street. "A gentleman in every pulse and every feeling;—I wish he were in better hands than Tichborne's, who is ruining him at an immoderate pace, and without allowing the poor boy to take out his ruin's worth in pleasure."

"Tichborne is an enigma to me," replied Lorimer. "Knowing him to be such another Squire Lackland as myself, I cannot make out how he gets on."

"He was an enigma to *me* five years ago; but now I know London better, and Tichborne only too well."

"His uncle, the Duke of Arlington, allows him two hundred a-year; on the strength of which he dresses better than any man in town—has the best equipage, the best valet:—belongs to all the clubs, and lives in the most exclusive society. Now, Lord Henry, his father, who is one of the respectable old pig-tail and Boodle school, has not a doit to bestow upon him, and has several daughters to marry—or maintain."

"All very true! and as soon as Tichborne—who is a gross sensualist, and as unprincipled as a horse dealer—became aware of all his hereditary deficiencies and misfortunes, he struck out a new profession for himself, and became a spendthrift-leech;—a middle-man between the

boy-lords and the Israelites;—and it is astonishing how many estates he has already disabled into nursing-trim. Tailors, jockeys, coachmakers, jewellers, and all the *avant couriers* of Banco Regis, are ready to kneel for his custom —that is, for his *orders;*—and poor Stapylford and Co. become tacitly sacrificed to the compact."

"By heavens! it is too bad!"

"True; but were they not in *his* hands, or some other of his illustrious confraternity, they would fall into those of sharpers, without even an 'Honourable' prefaced to their names, and out of the pale of amenability to a hair-trigger;—fellows to whom a horse-whipping, more or less, would appear of no account, and who would cheat *ad infinitum* accordingly. Your Tichbornes, on the contrary, are within pistol retribution."

"I, you know, am too small game for such a kite to fly at," said Lorimer. "But I remember, last year, he joined me as I was sauntering down Bond Street to Hoby's, where he concluded I was about to give an order; and when he saw me take out my purse and ask for a stamp receipt, I shall never forget his air of consternation.—'My dear fellow, what in Heaven's name are you about?' said he, drawing me aside. 'For God's sake, consider how scarce money is in London just now!'—As if I were making the bootmaker a gratuitous present!—But who is that beautiful woman bowing to you, Wallace?"

"In that green carriage?—Oh! a fair *parvenue!*"

"A countess, by the emblazonments."

"I mean a *parvenue*-woman of fashion. Although she must be verging on forty, she only commenced her vocation last year; having been hitherto satisfied with provincial nonentitysm; coming to town for a change of nurses, and a visit to the Exhibition; and returning to the lilacs and nightingales early in May."

"She is very handsome."

"Tolerably handsome, certainly; but she disfigures herself by adopting every last ultra-extravagant mode; and renders herself odious by running after all the fine people, like a banker's wife."

"Her rank ought to place her above such a degradation."

"She adores *me* just now, because I am in Lady Robert Lorton's set, who will have nothing to say to her; and as to Lisborough, she would lay foot-cloths of velvet from her house to his, if he would only step over them to visit her. Poor Lady Radbourne passes three hours a day in inditing little solicitation notes, trying to get here, and there, and every where, where she is not wanted. Good-by!—here we are at Sir Joseph's;—and Lady Monteagle's carriage, on the roll for departure, announces that the family are at home. I wish you joy."

CHAPTER XIV.

Peste, soit la sincérité! c'est un mauvais métier. Désormais j'y renonce, et je ne veux plus dire un mot de vrai. MOLIERE.

THE event was, however, no source of joy to Frederick; for, as the Monteagle equipage rumbled from the spot, an ethereal smile glanced upon him from its window, and a fair hand was so courteously kissed in his honour, that his heart-quake of the morning returned upon him more vehemently than ever; and, by the time he was ushered by a gouty butler—the grandson of the departed Dickinson—to the door of Lady Willingham's formal drawing-room, the divine Eleanor, and her matchless charms of mind and person, had thoroughly repossessed themselves of his imagination. His countenance was sentimentalised by a thousand tender emotions, but he was spared the perils of a scrutiny; for her ladyship was thoroughly engrossed by worthy Mrs. Darnham, and another equally respectable village-neighbour, enveloped in an equally comprehensive woollen shawl; whose matronly details had been of so medical a character as to drive poor Mary to a distant table—where she was hanging over her palette and an exquisite group of flowers. Mr. Lorimer, after the usual compliments to the three destinies who were so mysteriously laying their heads together in awful conclave, proceeded towards Miss Willingham's retreat, and seated himself by her side.

"What beautiful hyacinths, Mary!—they seem starting from the vellum; and how your group has advanced since I saw it last!"

"It is almost a fortnight since you were here," replied Mary, without raising her eyes from her drawing.

"Can it be possible?—I should scarcely have thought it a week!—indeed, it appears only a day!—a dear, delightful, dreamy, midsummer-day."

Mary's curiosity was now excited to lift her observation towards the countenance of the enthusiast, and, in doing so, she discovered that her own was somewhat pale, and that all its bloom appeared concentrated in the eyelids. Frederick instantly decided these effects to arise from the perfume of the flowers she was copying, and the arduous delicacy of her task. He had very little suspicion of his own share in the disfigurement;—he had very little idea how far his own attractions had influenced poor Mary's letter of refusal that morning to Sir William Wyndham; and the lecture of two hours and twenty minutes from her father, which had followed its despatchal;—that, since breakfast, she had been compelled to listen to a recital (first and second edition, paternal and maternal,) of the rent-roll of the Wyndham Park estate; and to her cousin Eleanor's private recapitulation of all the tender nothings whispered to her by Frederick Lorimer, in the course of Mrs. Grandison's ball and supper. Eleanor, it is true, had insisted quite as much on the general charms of the ball, upon the variety and fashion of her partners, and upon the Duke of Lisborough's renewed devotion to her sister Claudia;—Lorimer, and his attachment, had appeared to excite a very minor degree of interest among the pleasures of the evening; but she avowed herself conscious of its existence!—and to be loved by *him*, and remain indifferent to the distinction, was a stretch of philosophy utterly beyond poor Mary's comprehension! It is miraculous that the bouquet of hyacinths was not utterly effaced by the flood of silent and bitter tears which had signalised Lady Monteagle's departure, and the cessation of Eleanor Willingham's confidences. But *he* was by her side again; and she could not feel *very* unhappy in Frederick's presence.

"Mary!" said he, "you must bestow that little painting upon me as a *bouquet d'adieu.* I have only a week longer to remain among you; and when I am far away——"

Mary bent still closer over her work, and was guilty of several random touches.

"When I am far away, it will serve to remind me of the few last happy days I spent in England!"

"Is Charles aware that so early a period is fixed for your departure?" said she, in a low voice.

"Do not say *fixed*—I cannot bear that odious word. When I think of all the dangers of absence, Mary—when I consider the admiration with which the world will environ your lovely cousin, I can hardly believe that my courage will be equal to the effort of separation. So sweet a creature—so playfully, yet so harmlessly witty—so original, so *naïve,* so *enjouée* in her manners and ideas—so superior to the common-place routine of *missy* girls one meets with in London!—Eleanor Willingham combines all the sprightly grace of a Parisian, with the modesty and solid understanding of a true-born Englishwoman. How happened it, Mary, that you never mentioned nor described her to me in all the walks and conversations we have had together at Heddeston?"

The gentle Mary saw nothing overcharged in Frederick Lorimer's description of her cousin; it was enough that *he* thought her an angel, to sanctify the beatification in Mary's eyes; nor did she testily vindicate herself from the charge of "unlawfully concealing." "You forget," said she, mildly, "that we were mere children when we parted. Eleanor was always esteemed a very lovely and promising girl; but I remember once reading to you and my brother a passage from her letters, describing the Neapolitan carnival, which appeared to me a masterpiece of lively elegance; and you both said so much of its tone of flippancy and levity, that I closed the letter, and never mentioned my cousin's name to you again."

"English schoolboys are such pudding-brained oafs!—Dear Eleanor!—what would I give to see one of her graceful effusions now!—I have learned to render her justice; and how delightful to think that my two most

esteemed friends are her own nearest relatives—that if I ever have the happiness to call her *mine*, I shall also attain the privilege of naming *you*, dearest Mary—you and Charles—my cousins!"

"Have you—have you any probable chance of such an accomplishment of your wishes?" faltered Mary Willingham, not daring to look up.

"That is exactly the question I am come to ask of yourself."

"Of *me*, Lorimer?"

"You are in Eleanor's confidence. She regards you far more highly than any other member of her family,—she has too much discernment not to do you ample justice, dear Mary. Now, tell me truly—has she not spoken to you of me?—And, tell me truly again—have I any hope that she will deign to accept the devotion of my whole life—of my whole heart?"

Mary was conscious of a painful struggle between the agony of her feelings, and the determination to be perfectly candid;—and the heroism of honesty lent so fervid a flush to her cheek, and so intense a glance to her brow, that for a moment she appeared as lovely as the subject of their debate.

"She *has* spoken of you to me several times, Frederick; with partiality—with preference—but nothing further. Had she said more, indeed, than that she thought you agreeable, gentlemanly, and well-informed, I should have considered myself bound, as a woman, to keep her secret. But although Eleanor has deposited *no* secret with me implying confidence—I have every reason to believe she has not formed any other attachment."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer, fervently; "and thank *you*, my dear kind Mary, for——"

He was not permitted to give a full term to his importunate gratitude; for Dickinson, junior, again throwing open the drawing-room door, announced "Lord Lorimer." Poor Lady Willingham, who saw in the arrival of the pompous and somewhat tedious peer, only an unwelcome interruption to her gratifying flannel-and-caudle colloquy with her village gossips, received him with cold and deli-

berate equanimity; but when in throwing his large grey cod-like eyes round the room, they finally rested upon Miss Willingham, blushing and trembling — with his own son Frederick — *his younger son* — hanging over her chair — his Lordship puckered his leathern visage into a very peculiar smile, and drew himself up into an extra-elevation of gratified pride. Certain projects, which had more than once glanced across his mind, became condensed into stability by the relative position of the parties; and in the course of his stately strut towards the table to enquire after Miss Mary's health, and interest himself in her avocation, it occurred to his parental foresight that his third son George might be more conveniently forwarded to Leyden; and his second son, Frederick, entered at Cambridge, with a view to orders and the reversionary chance of the living of Heddeston: — including, of course, the daughter of the patron, and her fifty thousand pounds.

Lord Lorimer was at all times a most pompously urbane man; deeply sensible of the mercy of Providence in making him a peer, and elevating him above the sordid uses of the vulgar; and smitten with a most overflowing sympathy with all those of his own calling and degree. To be a nobleman was with him to be a vicegerent of Heaven; — to be a baronet was at least something: — had he lived in the days when the heads of the traitor-lords were exposed on Temple Bar, it is probable that he would have dwindled into a nervous atrophy; — or had he attained years of discretion when Lord Ferrers was hanged, it is certain that he would have gone into mourning. The ulterior object of his present visit to Grosvenor Square was to offer his felicitations on the reported marriage between Claudia Willingham and his Grace of Lisborough — a catastrophe which he regarded as conferring honour upon her kindred even unto the remotest generation.

"I trust your ladyship is persuaded," said Lord Lorimer, "of the deep interest with which Lady Lorimer and myself have watched the progress of an event so flattering to a family which has for many years honoured us with its friendship. Lady Maria Willingham is by birth my cousin, and I rejoice in her prosperity; but Sir Joseph and

Lady Willingham are by choice my friends, and every incident involving their honour and happiness is important in my estimation."

Mary, who had deserted her drawing-table in order to assist in entertaining her mother's guests, could not but consider this a singular mode of reasoning; but her lady-mother was still less inclined to accept Lord Lorimer's absurd plausibilities. Thoroughly out of humour with love and matrimony on Sir William Wyndham's account, she could not bear any allusion to her niece's prospects, and would not hear of being congratulated.

"If your Lordship have any serious reason for believing Sir Joseph's niece to be engaged to the Duke of Lisborough, I can only say that you are more fortunate in obtaining Lady Maria's confidence than *we* have been. She was here this morning, and I beg to say that not a word passed on the subject."

"Come—come, my dear madam;—this is scarcely using me like a friend—like an *old* friend. It is now eight years—or faith—I believe nine—eh! Frederick?—since you taught that young gentleman of mine to prefer a home at Heddeston Court to a home at Lorimer Hall. His own motives for the preference I leave him to account for to your ladyship; but I am not ashamed to acknowledge that from the period in question—(yes! it was certainly nine years ago) until now—I have never ceased to regard the second parents of a beloved son as my own first friends!"

Lord Lorimer paused, as when expecting the cheers of the House; or of his own county meetings after a clap-trap;—and Lady Willingham, utterly at a loss to conjecture the motives of all this grandiloquent courtesy, filled up the pause with a bow of vague acknowledgment.

"I am fully aware that young ladies are extremely tenacious of having these little affairs prematurely discussed—eh! Miss Mary?—but although lovers, like ostriches, fancy that in hiding their heads they escape notice altogether, still suspicions *will* arise—the world *will* talk!—And why not? What can be more honourable than the

marriage estate, when affording creditable prospects of worldly prosperity, and blessed by the sanction of an approving family?"

Lady Willingham looked spitefully towards her daughter, to point out the confirmation contained in this impressive exordium to her own maternal homily of the morning. Poor Mary blushed at the implication;—she was sick of the very thoughts of Sir William Wyndham, and would gladly have dispensed with all matrimonial allusions for the remainder of her days.

Lord Lorimer, observant of these symptoms of general consciousness, and reading in them confirmation strong of his previous suspicions, now resumed his oration.

"On this point, indeed, (and to you, my dear Lady Willingham, I need not scruple most unfashionably to acknowledge—on most others,) Lady Lorimer and myself entertain a perfect unanimity of opinion. We are not only satisfied, but deeply anxious, that our children should settle early in life; an advantage to their permanent prospects, which we are even willing to secure by personal sacrifices, and by——"

"My dear father!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer, unable to repress his feelings of exultation on this most new and unexpected announcement. "My dear sir!—This kindness adds a thousandfold to all our former obligations towards my mother and yourself."

Lord Lorimer tried to muster a little emotion, and to appear properly affected, for he suspected that an explanation was coming; but Lady Willingham, who felt that her own hearth-rug and the presence of Mesdames Darnham and Dodderwell formed a very singular scene for the display of the domestic sensibilities of a father and son so remotely connected with the family of Lord Lorimer and Frederick, began to twitch her shawl, and evince divers symptoms of impatience. She was herself a very undemonstrative woman, and regarded a *scene* of any kind as superfluous and impertinent. But she became still more vexed and still more indignant when, on glancing a second time towards Mary, she perceived that her blushes had given place to a death-like paleness, and that the poor girl could

scarcely keep her seat. Miss Willingham had been harassed during five successive hours with every variety of trial that could assail a delicate mind and feeling heart; and even *her* moral courage — great as it was — could no longer maintain her through the struggle.

"You are ill, dear Mary," said Mr. Lorimer going towards her. "Lady Willingham, will you give me leave to open a window? — the heat of the weather — the flowers — the ——"

"I believe, Frederick, we had better retire," said Lord Lorimer, looking significantly towards the mother of his future daughter-in-law. "A little crisis of this description is better consigned to female management."

Lady Willingham wishing both him and his son at Lorimer Hall, or any other remote point of the United Kingdom, bade them a hasty and sullen good-by; and when they arrived together at the foot of the stairs, Lord Lorimer courteously invited his son to accompany him in his low elderly phaeton as far as the House of Commons; where the hopeful head of the family was to plead the cause of his constituents, in an explosion of preconcerted verbosity, extremely well calculated to pair off the House into the respectful silence of solitude.

"My dear father," exclaimed Frederick, as they rounded the corner of Charles Street, "how shall I express my gratitude for what has fallen from your lips this morning; or my surprise that you should have so quickly penetrated my sentiments?"

"Old heads, Fred.! — old heads ——"

"Are not often connected, sir, with so much disinterested warmth of heart. I had apprehended that nothing would be more displeasing to you than the prospect of my marriage so early in life."

"The respectability of the Willingham family, and the rare merits of the young lady you have selected, form a strong argument in your favour."

"In point of fortune, however, my dear father ——"

"Frederick! I never was esteemed a mercenary man; — fortune is, in my opinion, a very secondary consideration,

when compared with birth and moral character. Of course, I shall immediately relinquish my Leyden plan;—you must get through the university with as little delay as possible;—and I have no doubt Sir Joseph will set every thing straight by presenting you to the living of Heddeston."

"I wish I had any reason to hope, sir, that this would be the case; but I suspect that very little real cordiality exists between him and Lady Maria."

"*Lady Maria!*—and why should he consult that silly woman about his church preferment? Let her content herself with marrying her own vain, frivolous, fine-lady daughters, without interfering in the disposal of his."

Mr. Lorimer was thoroughly mystified; but it was only for a moment. He scarcely dared, however, stammer forth his preface to an explanation.

"I fear, my lord, some fatal misunderstanding exists between us on this subject."

"I think not, Fred.," replied his lordship, with a self-complacent smile, clumsily touching his wheeler on the flank. "I am not much in the habit of being mistaken in my personal conjectures. I have long seen that you were desperately in love."

"I do not deny it, sir."

"With my respectable friend, Mr. Joseph Willingham's amiable daughter."

"With *Mary* Willingham, my lord?—Good God!—how unfortunate!—What can have possessed you with such a mistaken—such a fatal idea?"

"*Who* then, Mr. Frederick Lorimer, if I may presume to ask—who is the *real* object honoured by your flattering preference?" said his lordship, with dawning consciousness.

"My dear father—pray excuse me from disclosing her name just now."

"Upon my word, sir!"

"Yet what have I to hope from delay?—You assure me that fortune is a minor consideration;—that birth—that virtue——"

"Damn it, sir! speak out—what is the girl's name?—who the devil is she?"

"Lady Maria Willingham's second daughter," replied Frederick, in accents of despair.

"*Eleanor Willingham!*" shouted Lord Lorimer, in a tone of indignation; "a beggar, by all that is horrible!"

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

I sometimes almost think that eyes have ears;
This much is sure—that *out* of earshot, things
Are somehow echoed to the pretty dears,
Of which I can't tell whence their knowledge springs. BYRON.

ABOUT ten days after this afflicting explanation, Mary Willingham chanced to find herself at a party at Lady Dynevour's, interpolated into a group composed of the Miss Lorimers, and two or three "young men about town," upon whom they were in the habit of bestowing the exuberance of their colloquial animation, after the fashion conventionally denominated "flirting." They were two good-humoured, lively girls; but so ill-trained (according to Lady Maria Willingham's notion of education) as to distinguish very slightly between the "good matches" and the "detrimentals;"—and they were accordingly surrounded, on most occasions, by young ensigns in the Guards, Foreign Office and Treasury honourables, scarcely yet fledged into official importance, and other equally unavailable representatives of the masculine sex;—good at most for a *galopade* or a mazurka—to carry chairs in Kensington Gardens, or escort a fidgety horse through the exciting equestrian mob of the Parks.

"What has become of Frederick?" enquired Sir Comyne Wallace of Gertrude Lorimer. "I have been down to my uncle, in Shropshire, for a week, to see what has been done towards expediting him into an apoplexy; and I have not had a glimpse of Lorimer since my return."

"Of Frederick?—Have you heard nothing of his departure?—Why, he has been gone so long, that we have almost forgotten him! By this time poor Fred. is probably wandering on the banks of the Elbe, with a Meers-

chaum in his mouth, and the Sorrows of Werter in his bosom. Finding that he was stark mad with love and despair, my father was apprehensive that the police reports of the Morning Herald would acquaint us some day with the melancholy circumstance of his having taken the altitude of the central arch of Westminister Bridge; so my poor brother's trunks were packed *up*, and his disconsolate self *off*, before he had time for remonstrance."

"So much the better for him," observed Sir Comyne; "even though he should still venture on a personal inspection of the waters of the Elbe. Immediate drowning is preferable to hanging next season; which would have been poor Frederick's inevitable destiny. Lorimer is far too sensitively honourable a fellow to put up with a giddy flirting wife."

"Oh fie, Sir Comyne," interrupted Emily Lorimer, a young lady who always dealt in the ultrissimo of superlative. "I assure you the object of Frederick's attachment is the most delightful girl in London! — so accomplished, so entertaining! — in point of fashion there is nothing like her! In short, we all adore her; and if there had been any fortune on *her* side, or had my eldest brother been the lover instead of Fred., no possible objection could have been formed to the match. But pa thought that a *ménage sans six sous* would not prove *sans souci;* and therefore refused his consent."

Having applauded this piece of obsolete wit, Sir Comyne turned for further explanation of the conclusion of poor Frederick Lorimer's precipitate love affair to Mr. Ducie; who had been parrying, in the interval, the attacks of the fair Gertrude, on his lazy avoidance of balls, and his steady appearance at all the humdrum dowager-parties, such as those of Lady Dynevour.

"I assure you," said he, "I ground my public and social conduct upon the strictest principles — *of selfishness!* Having the constitutional misfortune to dance like an Otaheitan, I am always unwelcome as a partner; while at these dull parties, which so few young men condescend to patronise, I increase in value cent. per cent. I find no lady here creeping away into another room to avoid my

approach, as she would at Devonshire House, or any other *Académie Royale de danse et de musique ;* — among a tribe of old members, country baronets, and whist-playing mummies of the middle ages, I become quite a ' Triton of the minnows.'"

Gertrude Lorimer, like his majesty's lower house of parliament, was somewhat impatient of long speeches of explanation ; and had already turned her attention towards some lighter flirt — some one better inclined to garnish his *because* with a few personal compliments towards herself ; — and Sir Comyne Wallace seized on the opportunity to draw Ducie aside for further interrogation. The pressure of the crowd still, however, prevented their escape beyond the reach of the attentive Mary's delicate auricular organisation.

" What is all this history about Lorimer ? The last time we both supped with you at The Travellers he appeared enchanted with his prospects."

" Unfortunately his exultation proved premature, and realised the definition of an English summer, ' three fine days and a thunder-storm.' "

" And what brought about the final explosion ? "

" The overcharged electricity of the paternal atmosphere."

" A truce to metaphors, ' an thou lovest me.' "

" Well, then, in the simplest possible English — a thing *you* seldom condescend to use — Frederick pleaded guilty of flagrant love and folly, in the course of one of his father's pompous cross-examinations ; in consequence of which plea, Lord Lorimer condemned him, on his own evidence, to transportation for three years to some German university."

" His original sentence, if I remember. But tell me ! did the unhappy convict resign himself to the hulks, without any further attempt to secure a companion for his miseries ? Surely there was some notion of an elopement ? "

" So Lorimer flattered himself ; and an old uncle, who hoards his guineas among his chalk hills in Bedfordshire, having presented him with a few hundreds towards the purchase of his Leyden classics, he tried to persuade the fair Eleanor to come and live with him on *sauerkraut*

and *kalbsbraten,* upon an allowance of five hundred a year."

"A goodly prospect."

"I watched them both during supper one night at Lisborough House, while he was presenting these savoury images to her mind. I wish you could have beheld her countenance and his."

"I imagine that Miss Willingham's overflowed with indignation at such a barbarous proposal."

"On the contrary, the indignation was all on poor Fred.'s side of the question. As to the fair Eleanor, she did nothing but laugh; and seeing Lorimer's handsome face vary from the tender to the sublime, from the sublime to the persuasive, from the persuasive to the astonished, from the astonished to the indignant, and from the indignant to the magnanimously disdainful, I was quite placable when he woke me out of my beauty-sleep at nine o'clock the following morning to make his confessions, and explanations, and adieus."

"And were they tremendously lachrymose?"

"By no means; Lorimer was as indignant as Achilles — railed at the sex in general — and Miss Eleanor in particular; reviled a Parisian education as the cause of his woe — and ——"

"But did he *explain* the mystery?"

"There was no mystery in the case. 'Tis an old tale, and often told!' Miss Willingham begged to assure him that she thought him a very agreeable, gentlemanly personage — to dance with; but that neither he, nor love, nor matrimony, had ever for a single moment occupied her serious thoughts. She even recommended him, as a friend, to dismiss, on all future occasions, the idea of a love-match from his mind, as being the poorest bubble that ever floated in the chaos of a human understanding; — made him a low courtesy, wished him a pleasant journey, and left him planted, while *she* went off to dance with some booby baronet — a certain Sir William Wyndham, to the best of my remembrance."

"And thus ended poor Lorimer's eternal passion of a month's duration. Poor fellow! he is too single-hearted

and excellent himself, to be trusted unarmed among the herd of worldly, scheming, artful girls, with whom you and I, Ducie, may peril our hands and hearts without dread of defeat. Poor Lorimer ! I fear he has too much feeling not to suffer deeply from this disappointment."

" *I* do not *fear* it," observed Mr. Ducie, moving away. " I sincerely hope, on the contrary, that he has had a bilious fever, and will have a slow recovery ; for it is a lesson that will be useful to him as long as he lives."

Poor Mary trusted she did not smile too evidently during the continuance of this gratifying colloquy. It was the first regular explanation of the affair that had yet reached her. Frederick had not quitted England without despatching a few words of agonised farewell to " the sister of his dearest friend ;" but the mysterious billet had unfortunately chanced to fall into the hands of Lady Willingham, who, referring its inexplicative tenderness personally to her daughter, and her daughter's refusal of Sir William Wyndham to Mr. Lorimer's incoherent eloquence, acted as many other prudent mammas would have done. In the absence of a fire, she tore both note and envelope into delicate strips, rolled them into slender *allumetts ;* and deposited the inflammable collection in the taper-stand of her own dressing-room for immediate use.

Lord Lorimer, meanwhile, had studiously cautioned his gentle wife and giddy daughters against any betrayal of " that ass Frederick's cursed folly, to the family of his estimable friend, Sir Joseph Willingham ;" and Eleanor and Claudia were so thoroughly intent upon appropriating the proprietor of Wyndham Park as an accessory to the Duke of Lisborough, and so much in terror of making this little piece of domestic treachery manifest to their cousin, that they exerted all their ingenuity to avoid her visits and mistime their own. And thus Mary had endured ten very uneasy days — ten restless nights ; and had been in far greater danger of the bilious fever, and the slow recovery advocated by Mr. Ducie, than the roving Frederick himself. She had occasionally met her cousins at evening parties since his departure ; *his* name, of course, had never passed the lips of either ; but she had read upon Eleanor's tri-

umphant brow, and in her sparkling eyes, confirmation strong of all her own secret apprehensions. She was convinced that nothing but the consciousness of plighted love, and an auspicious, though secret engagement, could be the origin of her visible joy and self-content; and as a future Mrs. Frederick Lorimer — living on love and law in lodgings within the narrow limits of Boswell Court — she contemplated her cousin prospectively, as the happiest and most enviable of human beings.

Nor was the delight with which she listened to a recapitulation of Eleanor's base and heartless desertion of poor Frederick unmixed with commiseration for himself, and indignation against the jilt. But Mary Willingham, with all her virtues, was but human after all. She was quickly consoled — quickly recovered her serenity of mind; nay, so deeply did she at length exult that her dear brother's bosom friend should have escaped the snares of a coquette, and the dangers of a heartless and worldly-minded companion for life, that, during Mr. Ducie's explanation, her usually pale cheek became flushed with the deepest crimson, and her eyes sparkled with so brilliant an air of triumph, that many persons present pronounced Mary Willingham that evening to be as handsome as either of her beautiful cousins; and more than one of the Misses Lorimers' suite of detrimentals requested to be favoured with a presentation to their lovely friend.

But Mary had not the smallest genius for being a beauty. She preferred at all times being approved to being admired; and now that Frederick was gone, whose fickle taste might have been in some measure directed by the finger-post of the world's adoration, she was perfectly contented to remain unnoticed in the shade. She had long been aware of the insufficiency of her charms to attract and retain those affections in which alone she wished to claim a part; and her recent apprehensions having now subsided, she was satisfied to congratulate herself on Mr. Lorimer's escape from a giddy coquettish wife, without indulging in any vain ambition of conquests for herself.

"Only conceive, dearest Mary," exclaimed Gertrude Lorimer, turning suddenly towards her, "here is Lady

Dynevour quietly assembling us to yawn at each other, and old Lady Monteagle fighting over the chances of the odd trick; and neither of them have the least idea of poor Lady Stapylford's disasters."

"Lady Stapylford?—what has occurred to her?"

"To *her*, nothing; but that wild boy, Montagu, Mr. Willingham's and Frederick's precious *protégé*, has been expelled from Oxford; and Lord Stapylford, who has always been kept in the dark with regard to his son's excesses, has been so greatly shocked by this very unexpected exposure, that he is suffering from an attack of spasmodic gout, and his life is despaired of."

"I fear Mr. Stapylford is preparing a long series of misfortunes for himself and his parents," said Mary, thoughtfully. But at that moment Lord Lorimer and General de Vesci, who had been nailed to the whist-table all the evening, approached the young ladies. His lordship was, as usual, most assiduous to his friend Sir Joseph's amiable daughter; a courtesy which Mary was wholly at a loss to interpret. Lord Lorimer, indeed, was an enigma to her comprehension; she knew not how to reconcile the tale she had recently heard respecting his opposition to Frederick's union with her cousin Eleanor, and the exhibition of tender sensibility she had herself witnessed, and referred at the time to his unqualified approval of the match. She knew him to be a very courteous and courtly man in general; fond of as much idle popularity as can be won by affable bows and universal civility; and had she previously doubted the fact, her opinion would have been confirmed, in the present instance, by his demeanour towards the equally urbane general, respecting their common relative — Lady Maria Willingham.

"I do not see your charming nieces here to-night, General de Vesci. My friend and kinswoman, Lady Maria, is one of those prudent mothers who are wise enough to economise on the beauty of their offspring. Mere homely girls may run from party to party, and fly from ball to ball;—their absence or their presence remains equally unnoticed. But Lady Maria is well aware that Miss Claudia and Miss Eleanor are not to be lightly passed over; nobody

could remain in doubt whether the Miss Willinghams were seen to grace such and such a *fête*. Their mother does well not to render their appearance a too general favour."

"I should have thought," replied the general, with a government-house bow, and quite mistaking his meaning, "that any society, graced by your lordship's daughters, would have done honour to my nieces. I detest finery and affectation; and Lady Maria is, in fact, under serious obligations to Lady Monteagle—such as ought not to have permitted her to dispense with an appearance at Lady Dynevour's party."

"I assure you, General de Vesci," good naturedly interrupted Mary Willingham, "that Lady Maria and her daughters formed the chief ornaments of the room, while you were engaged at whist in the early part of the evening. They were accompanied by Sir William Wyndham; and were obliged to go away to Lady Robert Lorton's."

"To Lady Robert Lorton's!" ejaculated the general, secretly delighted by this announcement. "Now that is the very thing of which I complain. What attraction ought a new friend, or rather a new acquaintance, such as Lady Robert Lorton, to offer in competition with the claims of an old country neighbour?"

"I had understood that there existed a family relationship between the houses of Lorton and De Vesci."

The general had now gained his point. "Certainly, my lord! certainly;—James, the thirteenth Duke, and seventeenth Earl of Lisborough, being son to Lord Adolphus Lorton, by Mildred, the daughter of John, fourth Earl of Chesterville, whose mother was a De Vesci!"

This valuable intelligence being partly addressed to Mary, she thought it polite to acknowledge its importance by a grateful bow; much marvelling at the same time that any human memory could be so ill furnished, as to find lumber-room for such a tissue of obsolete trash. Not so Lord Lorimer; *he* was quite a curiosity-hunter of minor incidents—loved an Anno Domini to his very heart—could date all the existent peerage to a month and a day; and entertained so singular a partiality for the perusal of proper names, that he always employed the half hour preceding a procras-

tinated dinner in reading the Red Book, or the Court Guide; nor did he ever pass over the weekly Morning Post list of Lady Sefton's or Lady Salisbury's assemblies —especially the latter, which generally included himself and family.

"Under these circumstances, general, we will not blame the young ladies for seeking a society at once so distinguished and so fascinating as that of Lady Robert Lorton. Besides—if public and newspaper report is to be credited —which, by the way, requires in most modern instances an extraordinary stretch of credulity—an alliance in the present generation is likely to renew the earlier consanguinities of the respective ancestors of the De Vescis and the Lortons. Permit me, my dear sir, to offer you my felicitations on an event so gratifying to every common relative of Miss Claudia Willingham and Lady Maria."

The general affected, in reply, that peculiar smile of conscious unconsciousness with which diplomatists attempt to conceal their total want of information on any subject of importance. "The Duke of Lisborough was to have met my niece and her daughters at dinner at my house on Thursday last," said he, evasively, and omitting to state that the "*was* to have met" consisted simply in an invitation and a refusal. "But his grace was so eager concerning his friend Lord Barringhurst's amendment in the House of Lords, that we were forced to resign the pleasure of his company."

"My cousin, Claudia, and Lady Barringhurst, have recently become extremely intimate," observed Mary.

"Aha!" said the delighted general, "*that* indeed explains the business. Mrs. de Vesci's relatives, Sir Robert, Sir Thomas, Sir Richard, and Sir Hew Westland, suggested some such motive for his grace's absence. Men of the world, like the Westlands, are always familiar with those little rumours of society."

Lord Lorimer, who despised the whole tribe of Westland with all the force of his aristocratic hauteur, regarding them as the mere counterocracy of city honours, bowed with an air of lofty superiority. He was quite aware that such people as the Westlands give excellent dinners, main-

tain showy equipages, and purchase country seats well thinned of their timber by some former spendthrift proprietor;—but with respect to their acquaintance with the *on dits* of society—saving such frothy scum as floats on the surface of the clubs—his lordship entertained an opinion of his own.

"I hope Mrs. de Vesci is well?" interposed Mary Willingham, embarrassed by the pause occasioned by Lord Lorimer's deliberate sneer. "I do not see her here to-night?"

"Mrs. de Vesci has unfortunately so long accustomed herself to the luxurious habits of a more enervating climate, that she finds it difficult to rouse herself after dinner sufficiently for the habits of general society. On the present occasion, she had wholly overlooked the date of Lady Dynevour's obliging invitation."

"Stupid old dormouse!" thought Lord Lorimer; but he only observed aloud, but aside to Mary, "Ah! my dear Miss Willingnam! it is not every lady of any age who emulates *your* admirable habits of domestic activity. My son Frederick has made me intimately acquainted with the excellent customs of Heddeston Court;—they made a deeper impression upon his young mind than you are probably aware of. Poor Fred. was very much to be pitied in leaving England at the present crisis;—let me trust, however, that he will not be wholly forgotten during his absence. I am anxious to persuade my friends, Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham, to visit Lorimer Park in the course of the summer, in order that my girls may find before their eyes a model of all that is graceful and praiseworthy in their own sex. I am anxious that the Miss Lorimers should continue to cultivate the friendship which you have hitherto condescended to bestow on their brother."

Mary, touched and embarrassed beyond her own control, blushed and bowed, and bowed and blushed again. She could not at all understand the drift of Lord Lorimer's politeness; but she had reason to believe that its exuberance was sufficiently hypocritical; and had he not been Frederick's father, it is probable that she would have de-

scended Lady Dynevour's staircase with the impression of having been engaged in conversation with a very contemptible personage.

CHAPTER II.

> The lovely oligarchs of our gynocracy!
> You may see such at all the balls and dinners,
> Among the proudest of our aristocracy;
> So gentle, charming, charitable, chaste—
> And all by having tact as well as taste. BYRON.

Is it wonderful that the young and the gay and the brilliant should fly from society of this common-place and twaddling description to a coterie such as that of Lady Robert Lorton?—from whist to *écarté*—from quadrilles to the mazurka—from turbans and India shawls to *coëffures à la Courlande*, and *robes à la Marie Mignot*—from twice and thrice told tales to the *bon-mots* of Lord Granville, or the original anecdotes of Mr. Tichborne?—from the ceremonious formality of dowagers, male and female, to the luxurious and high-bred ease of a Lady Barringhurst and a Lady Rachel Verney?

The Willinghams, who were estimated, in old Lady Monteagle's matter-of-fact and provincial set, only at the rate of their fifteen hundred per annum, were welcomed into the little diamond *bouquet* in Arlington Street with the eagerness befitting their united powers of enhancing its brilliancy. Lady Barbara Desmond paused in the midst of her flirtation with Lord Cosmo Somerset, to blow a kiss to the two lovely girls, whom she might naturally have regarded as dangerous rivals. Sir George Wolryche—who had been guarding a little treasure of Parisian scandal to do honour to their arrival—accompanied them towards Lady Robert's own especial divan; Lady Barringhurst extended her hand to Lady Maria with her usual fascinating air of gentle friendliness, while Henry Mulgrave attempted to attract her daughters towards the music

room, where Lady Desmond, and several other amateurs, were attempting the score of a new opera of Spontini's, which had just arrived from Berlin among some equally important diplomatic despatches. The party was not large; but it consisted of persons on such excellent terms with each other, that every one was occupied, and no one listless. *Chacun y trouvait sa chacune*, and consequently no one was missed or wanted. One lady, indeed, gazed vainly and discontentedly around her for an absent knight; — but, alas! *he* was no Paladin of hers — as was proved by the sequel.

Eleanor Willingham, who had obtained permission from her dear friend, Lady Robert, to bring with her the stupid Sir William Wyndham — on whom she was now intent to try the whole battery of her charms — drew towards her ladyship's little colloquial knot, to thank her for the favour; which was in fact one of no small account from a person so exclusively exclusive in her circle of acquaintance. But as Eleanor accepted the seat vacated for her by Lord Grandville, it appeared to her discriminating ear and eye that her arrival had interrupted some subject of previous discussion. This suspicion, however, neither intimidated nor perplexed her mind. Lady Robert Lorton was a person of such irreproachable good faith, that those *really* honoured by her friendship felt their interests and their characters to be safe in her hands. No envy, no jealousy, no malice ever tempted her to treachery; and Eleanor Willingham was satisfied that nothing more offensive than some unpleasing piece of intelligence was thus guarded from her participation.

"Only imagine, dear Eleanor, the folly of that restless Lady Radbourne," exclaimed Lady Robert Lorton, changing the subject of conversation by a somewhat syncopical transition. "You know how laboriously she has been attempting to force the condescension of her acquaintance upon me. Last year, at Worthing, she sent me a long explanatory bill to the hotel, which poisoned all its inmates with *frangipane*, imploring me to carry off my sweet little angels to Hastings or Brighton without delay, or that the measles would save me all further trouble of their removal.

—'As a mother herself, she thought it her duty to inform me that she had ascertained, beyond a doubt, that Nos. 3. 7. and 19., in Wellington Buildings (where my ladyship's lodgings were said to be engaged), had been recently affected with measles in their several nurseries.'"

"How very friendly! — how very amiable!" involuntarily exclaimed the matter-of-fact Sir William Wyndham.

Eleanor blushed for the density of her lover; and Lady Robert turned to examine her unsophisticated guest with an air of profound amazement, highly amusing to Lord Grandville.

"Of course you were all gratitude for an attention so free from officiousness," said he, sarcastically, "and returned a visiting ticket with your answer to the little note scented with *frangipane*."

"You know me better!" replied Lady Robert, laughing. "Besides, a card bearing written evidence of its emanation from the infected locality of Wellington Buildings would have driven poor Lady Radbourne's maternal sensibilities to distraction. No!—I braved the peril of the measles, and the far greater peril of making her acquaintance — and for my valour's sake escaped both; although my donkey-cart ran against her barouche and four on all the roads; and although she used to toady my Italian greyhound whenever she met me on the sands. She even took the liberty of giving my two poor boys an indigestion, by stuffing them with indiscriminate pine-apple ice in a provincial confectioner's shop in the dog-days."

"I believe the shops at Worthing are reckoned very good," again judiciously interposed the Kentish baronet.

"Nothing but a Medea would condemn her offspring to promiscuous confectionary in this land of chemical substitutes," said Lord Grandville, gravely. "Muriatic acid and corrosive sublimate form the staple material of our *pralines* and *gimblettes*."

The baronet was stultified; for the gimblets of his own acquaintance were formed of wood and metal, and pretended to no qualities beyond those of acupuncture.

" And what is Lady Radbourne's new manœuvre?" enquired Eleanor. " Has she advanced openly — or have you discovered her lurking in ambuscade?"

" This morning Rosalie woke me out of a delicious dream, to present me with a billet upon blue satin paper, covered all over with vignettes. I started from the horrid spectacle as if it had been an implement of destruction! — but concluding it an application from some of Lord Robert's Welsh constituents for one of my vouchers for the next charity-ball, or perhaps an answer to my advertisement for a nursery governess, I bade Rosalie open, and read it to me."

" *Apparemment c'est quelque galanterie anonyme qui s'addresse à Miladi,*" said poor Rosalie, forgetting that she is no longer an inhabitant of the *Chausée d'Antin.* " *Car le billet est accompagné d'un boa magnifique; et cependant je ne trouve nulle part le mot de l'énigme.*"

" Accompanied by a boa — why surely Lady Radbourne never dreamed of presenting you with a *cadeau,* by way of bribing you to know her?"

" Not quite so bad — but very nearly! The billet explained to me that poor Lady Radbourne, who seems to be short-sighted as well as ill-bred, had unfortunately brought away this luckless boa in mistake for her own, from Mrs. Grandison's ball; and instead of returning it to the groom of the chambers, as any one else would have done, it appears that she has been exhibiting it to all her morning visiters, for the chance of having it owned — or more probably for the advantage of severally acquainting them that she had been included within the ring-fence enclosing Mrs. Grandison's semi-savage horde."

" So that having attempted to convict every other human being in London of feloniously appropriating her property, she has at length been driven, as a last resource, to fix her suspicions on Lady Robert Lorton."

" Never venture to anticipate the *bonne bouche* of such a narrative as mine! — You are still wide of the mark. She assures me, in the blue satin billet, that one and all of these odious morning visiters of hers have conspired to assert that nothing so beautiful, so elegant, so valuable, and

so distinguished as the unlucky boa thus peremptorily forced into her possession, was ever seen within the bills of mortality, saving upon my ladyship's shoulders; and Lady Radbourne furthermore declares, that she has deprived herself of rest and food, in order to accelerate its restoration to its rightful owner."

"Lady Radbourne appears to be blessed with the gift of circumlocution."

"Endowed with the supereminence of human folly!" exclaimed Lady Robert. "I had the tact to ascertain, however, by a shop-ticket still clinging to the extreme extremity of the tail, that the boa had been purchased of Maradan;—and of Maradan I learned, without evasion, that it was bought in as a bargain by Lady Radbourne herself only yesterday morning; plainly proving, by these means, that this would-be fine lady considered my acquaintance worthy purchase by the sum total of fifteen guineas and a — falsehood."

"I should rather imagine," observed Lord Grandville, "from *such* a standard of valuation, that poor Lady Radbourne is the strictest economist in London."

"And how did you evade this notable springe?" enquired Eleanor.

"So bold a measure of impertinent ill-breeding demanded very little consideration on my part; so I sent her back her purchase by the hands of Lord Robert's Irish groom, who is capable of communicating the perfume of the stables to every object he touches, or even looks upon."

"Without one little line in answer to the *billet à vignettes?*"

"With Lady Robert Lorton's compliments and assurances that she had not worn such a thing as a boa for several years past."

"Poor Lady Radbourne! — what a grievous pity that she could not be

Content to dwell in decencies for ever,

in the rural shades of her beautiful park! — She has not the smallest talent for the profession of fine ladyism; and

her laborious and ineffectual efforts to display the barest shoulders in the best society in London, only tend to render her ridiculous. If not exactly destined to 'chronicle small beer,' she is at least admirably adapted to chronicle *iced* claret and *hot* sauterne for the suppers of her provincial balls. And she will contrive to distinguish herself through life by breaches of the peace of fashion."

"I trust she may learn to distinguish herself by nothing worse," observed Lord Grandville. "A woman so covetously greedy of the follies of the day may, perhaps, ultrafy some day or other in a less blameless path to notoriety."

"We have no right to anticipate evil!" said Lady Robert, with a gesture of languid impatience. "Let us laugh at Lady Radbourne — for her labours demand some such sort of recompense. But she is a good mother, and, as far as I know, a good wife and a good woman; and may therefore claim exemption from the tax of personal scandal."

"Dearest Lady Robert!" exclaimed Henry Mulgrave, who had approached unperceived in the course of the Radbourne anecdote, "be merciful, and dissolve the spell by which you have enchanted Miss Eleanor Willingham to your side. We cannot get on in the music-room without her baritone to perfect the most exquisite quintette that ever breathed its harmonies on mortal ear! — Lady Desmond has been singing for *two* this half-hour past; but her powers are limited to this bi-vocal exertion. — Have I your sanction to convey Miss Willingham as a prisoner through yonder 'traitor's gate?'"

"Go, love!" said Lady Robert. "I will allow twenty minutes for your bright genius to blunder on towards perfection; and when I consider that your quintette has had time to become endurable to ears polite, I will follow you to the music-room, and enact audience with all fitting forbearance and partiality."

Eleanor rose to accompany Mr. Mulgrave. "I do not think your sister is well," whispered he, as the door-way of the music-room brought them for a moment into nearer

contact. "Take no notice of my warning, but pray devote your kind attention to her support."

Eleanor Willingham laughed at this solemn admonition. "I never saw Claudia in better health, or higher spirits," said she. "We have been riding together all the morning — the heat was oppressive, and she may have possibly over fatigued herself."

Henry Mulgrave shook his head with an incredulous smile. "*I* tell you that she is ill," he replied; "and time, I fear, will accredit my medical skill."

On reaching the pianoforte, Eleanor Willingham — however astonished, however reluctant — was secretly obliged to admit the reasonableness of the officious Mulgrave's prognostications. Claudia, who had left her side scarcely half an hour before — calm with the even temperature of a heart at ease, and beautiful both from nature and from the gratifying consciousness of general admiration — had acquired, during her sister's absence, an air of feverish anguish, such as rarely disfigures a brow at once so lovely and so young. She had been singing;—she was still smiling and talking! — but Eleanor saw in a moment that something was terribly wrong.

Approaching her sister with affected unconcern, and gradually edging her way through the flirtation of Lord Cosmo and Lady Barbara, and the less overt but equally intimate inter-communication between Mr. Tichborne and Lady Barringhurst, Eleanor whispered a few words of eager enquiry. "Dearest Claudia! what has happened?"

"*Happened?* — what *should* happen? — unless a grievous massacre committed by our united inexperience upon the beauties of this lovely new opera!" said she aloud.

"Claudia — Claudia! this to *me?* — You are agitated beyond the power of control or disguise."

"Hush! hush! — for worlds do not let these people suspect for a moment that my calmness is assumed!"

"You distract me by this mystery."

"Once more let me implore you to forbear! This is no scene, and no moment for explanations. — Lady Desmond! my sister is petitioning for leave to divide your labour; — Mr. Mulgrave, Eleanor is eager to attempt the

intricacies of the tenor part, which ought to do justice to your beautiful bass."

Eleanor, shocked to perceive by how violent an effort her sister attempted to subdue the tumult of her feelings, and completely in the dark as to the origin of their excitement, could scarcely command her voice to acquit herself creditably of her part in the concert; — and although Sir William Wyndham, who had assiduously followed her into the music-room, repeatedly assured her that her voice was much higher, and lower, and louder than that of the celebrated Miss Tomkins, of Drury Lane Theatre, she was fully aware that she had been heard to great disadvantage among the performers. Affecting an anxiety to examine the score of the new opera, she hung over the music-book with a view to conceal her tremour and perplexity; and while apparently engrossed by the interest of its minims and crotchets — its *adagios* and *animatos* — she contrived to overhear the broken fragments of a conversation between Sir George Wolryche and Sir Comyne Wallace — who had just arrived from Lady Dynevour's party — which served in some measure to unravel the root of the mystery.

"But what could they expect of such a silly boy as Vallerhurst?" observed Sir Comyne. "He was sent abroad by his family to wean him from such drunken schoolboy follies as breaking lamps — charging the watch — overturning mail-coaches — and getting into promiscuous quarrels at Stevens's. Did they expect that he would improve his classical scholarship by a perusal of all the *cartes* of all the *cafés* in Paris? — or his judgment by pelting sugar-plums at the Carnival?"

"I do not suppose they cared much either for his wit or his wisdom. He is come of a race whose excesses generally consign them to the family-vault before they attain the age of twenty-five; and his guardians were accordingly anxious that Vallerhurst should marry as early as possible, and bequeath an heir to so precarious a line."

"To effect which they betroth him in his cradle, and send him to waste away the exuberant folly of his minority at a distance of fifteen hundred miles from his affianced bride!"

"Had he remained in England, he would probably have visited Gretna Green with his mother's maid. He always looked upon little Lady Anastasia as a bitter dose inflicted upon him by prescription; — and loathed her accordingly."

"And *who* did you say had been honoured by a seat in his britschka?"

"*Britschka!* — you are dreaming, my dear Wallace! — I simply told you that he engaged a *felucca* at Naples; embarked for Corsica with a pretty little actress whom he had stolen away from the Tordinone, or some other minor theatre at Rome; — and they have since been married at Cagliari, by as legal a ceremony as was ever sanctioned by Doctors' Commons, and both houses of parliament to boot."

"How cursedly absurd! — And when did the intelligence reach his guardians?"

"Yesterday morning."

"And who are they? — his mother and maiden aunts?"

"No! there is a turtle-eating Lombard Street baronet — a Sir somebody Westland — by way of man of business; and poor old pottering Lord Bridgenorth — the Ark-adian whom I suspect Noah threw overboard for prosing — by way of man of dignity. This hopeful couple had a cabinet council of half a dozen hours' duration to decide whether, and *how*, this delicate dilemma should be communicated to the Burgoynes. But Lord Burgoyne had got the start of them! — having received the intelligence by the despatch-bag the day before, from the pen of our resident at Naples."

"And it followed that ——"

"That when Sir —— Westland made his appearance at ten o'clock last night, and in a private audience, and with infinite pomposity communicated the catastrophe to Lord Burgoyne, and expressed his melancholy hopes that Lady Anastasia's health would withstand the shock of her fatal disappointment — his lordship had the triumph to reply, that having been already apprised of the delicate fact, his daughter had that morning accepted the hand of the Duke of Lisborough, who had been dining with them *en famille*, and was now sitting with the 'Didone Abbandonata' in the adjoining room."

It was fortunate for Eleanor Willingham that the music

of Sir William Wyndham's creaking shoes — the product of the most eminent Hoby of the archiepiscopal city of Canterbury — approaching at that moment, served to drown her own irrepressible exclamation of surprise. The Duke of Lisborough and Lady Anastasia Burgoyne! — alas! poor Claudia!

"What could tempt him to select a little insignificant being, who will probably be lost under the shade of her own strawberry-leaves?" exclaimed Sir Comyne Wallace. "Poor Anastasia! — I shall always call her the *duchessità* — for I am persuaded she will never expand into a full-grown, full-blown 'woman of rank and fashion,' as the newspapers phrase it. The Duke of Lisborough! — He who might have thrown the handkerchief to all that was loveliest and brightest and most fascinating in Europe; — he to condemn himself to the digestion of such a piece of

Mere white curd of ass's milk!"

"I suspect that Lady Anastasia's charm, in his grace's estimation, consisted in the very insignificance you despise. He has been so accustomed to enact the parts of king, queen, and knave, in the Calmersfield pack; — so used to the deference exacted by solitary bachelor supremacy, that it would not have suited him to find his future partlet crow too loudly. His grace is a great monopoliser of minor prerogatives; — and poor little Burgoyne will not dispute his long established rights and privileges."

"Every man to his taste! — Give *me* a ripple on the waters to prevent utter stagnation! — Give *me* a breeze that is sometimes contrary, to disperse the impulses of health and animation over the surface of the land. A dead calm — a calm for life — is little short of moral extinction."

"And what is to become of all the lions and the unicorns who have been fighting for the crown? — what is to be the destiny of the fair pretenders to the throne of Calmersfield? — What says Lord Robert to the catastrophe of the farce?"

"*Farce?* — I would have you to know that he regards it as the most deadly of tragedies. But hush! — You forget, in your strictures upon the lions and unicorns, that

the little Willinghams are within bowshot of the arrows of your irony."

But Sir George Wolryche might have spared his caution. The latter part of his discourse had already been rendered inaudible to Eleanor, by the unmelodious movements of the present object of her own matrimonial manœuvres, and by the still less musical periods of his leaden eloquence. Sir William Wyndham, guided by the delicate tact which instigated all his sayings, and most of his doings, was delivering to her impatient ears his own version of the Vallerhurst and Lisborough romance; repeatedly assuring her that all the world had believed his grace to be engaged — or at least deeply attached — to her charming sister; and expressing his earnest trust that Miss Claudia's affections had not been touched, nor her expectations unfairly excited, by the Duke of Lisborough's attentions. "In these times," Sir William delicately observed, "disinterested love was of very rare occurrence; men were apt to exact either rank or fortune, or both, in exchange for the liberty they resigned."

To the high-spirited Eleanor, all this was killing *à coup d'épingles;* and she was in agonies of consternation lest the unhappy Claudia should overhear the well-timed and feeling oration of the man of Kent. Alas! — poor Claudia's auricular sense was blunted beyond the reach of Sir George Wolryche's wit, or Sir William Wyndham's dunderheaded sympathy. A mist of mind appeared to envelope every surrounding object; strange sounds and incoherent words rang in her ears. From the moment she had heard the names of the Duke of Lisborough and Lady Anastasia Burgoyne coupled by the report of persons only too intimately versed in their movements and projects, all other sounds appeared incapable of conveying a definite idea to her mind. Eleanor was apprehensive that her sister's abstraction and self-abandonment must be as evident to the whole room as it was to herself; — she would have given worlds for the power of removing her unobserved from the circle; — and every lingering moment of their compulsory sojourn appeared an age to the impatience of her irritation.

She had yet to learn the true nature of Lady Robert

Lorton's coterie. She had yet to learn the principles which govern the little republics of aristocratic selfishness; — that in the commonwealths of fashionable life, pleasures and not pains are brought for participation into the general stock; — that the sick lion and the miserable martyr of *bon ton* are alike condemned to oblivion; — that in the general surprise excited by the announcement of the duke's marriage, Claudia and her hopes had not once been thought of; — and that amid the joyous excitement of the scene and the hour, her sister's pale cheek and distracted brow were a matter of utter neglect, and utter indifference!

The sisters had, however, a scene and a trial to endure, compared with which the impertinent condolence of the world had been easy of encounter; and this was the first *tête-à-tête* explosion of Lady Maria's disappointment.

Eleanor, who was deeply affected by her sister's condition, exerted her utmost eloquence in the cloak-room to persuade Sir William Wyndham to accept a seat in their carriage. Knowing that his presence would be a restraint upon her mother's violence, for at least half of their road towards Seymour Street, she persisted in assuring him that it was a rainy night — or that it would, could, should, or might rain; — she would not hear of his betaking himself to his cabriolet, which was in attendance. Poor Sir William — albeit somewhat astonished at the interest expressed by Eleanor in the state of his lungs, and his contingent chances of a rheumatic fever — knew not how to resist her impetuous allurements; and almost before he was aware of it, he found himself rolling onwards towards the celibatorial retreats of the Albany, in a rickety landau with three silent women, enacting mute audience to his apologies for the intrusion. In some admiration of their protracted silence, he bade them good night at the door of the porter's lodge; but could his asinine ears have followed the murmur of their departing wheels, his wonder would have ceased long before they reached the turn of Clifford Street.

Had the Saville Row of those days presented its smooth surface of actual Macadamisation, he might have admired the sudden burst of maternal eloquence with which Lady Maria Willingham immediately began to bewail the griev-

ous destiny apparently menacing her patience with the inseparable society and maintenance of both her daughters!—During her long apprenticeship to worldcraft, she had acquired a habit of control over one of the vilest of tempers; but, like other violent movements subdued by violent coercion, it burst forth at times to rage with redoubled fury. Regardless of the pain and mortification personally endured by her daughters on the present occasion, she hesitated not to aggravate their vexation by a thousand degrading epithets; assuring them that they had been a drawback upon her own comfort and happiness from the hour of their birth, and upbraiding their folly and mismanagement as having solely originated the failure of her favourite project.

"She had forewarned them of the undeviating devotion required by the duke;—she had forewarned them against a too ready adoption of the habits of Lady Robert Lorton's set, as being offensive to Lady Grayfield, the secret president of his grace's council—and irritating to the duke's selfish vanity—the mainspring of his grace's character. Yet they had laughed, waltzed, flirted with other men—with a set of mere idle, worthless detrimentals—in defiance of her admonitions! They had made their original views upon the duke apparent to all London—yet had wanted the force of character—the tact—the filial submission—requisite to carry their designs into execution!—Miss Eleanor Willingham had chosen to show herself up, as open to the addresses of a contemptible younger brother such as Mr. Frederick Lorimer; and Miss Claudia had condemned herself to eternal ignominy by an unavailing siege of Lisborough House! Her uncle, General de Vesci, had told her from the first how the affair would end;—her friend, Lady Monteagle, had apprised her that the whole world laughed at their plot;—even the impertinent Westlands had suggested that the obstinacy of the young ladies would pre-assure them of defeat!—For the future, however, she renounced all interest in their concerns—all measures for their advancement—all hopes of their establishment. They had persisted in exposing themselves beyond the hope of redemption, and might meet the consequences as they could."

A total expenditure of breath alone suspended Lady Maria's harangue. Fortunately it sought not, nor would have brooked, a reply; for neither of her daughters were capable of utterance. Let it not be supposed that they were weeping under a sense of her displeasure, or the alarm excited by her repeated assurances of having discarded them for ever from her affections. The high-spirited Eleanor was swelling with indignation; and secretly resolving to accept Sir William Wyndham, whom she despised and detested, on his slightest hint of a proposal, in order to escape from such a home and such a mother; and poor Claudia was aware of a tempest of maternal vituperation, "but nothing wherefore." Her whole frame seemed paralysed by the shock she had undergone;—and when under her sister's careful tending she retired for the night, she obeyed the injunctions of Eleanor with the submission of a child, and "lay down in her loveliness," with the marble immobility of a statue.

CHAPTER III.

Il n'y a point dans le cœur d'une jeune personne un si violent amour, auquel l'intérêt ou l'ambition n'ajouté quelque chose. LA BRUYERE.

ELEANOR WILLINGHAM was an intelligent, and, in many respects, an amiable and generously-minded girl. She possessed in an unusual degree those excellent gifts and qualities which may be moulded into virtue by a good education. But from her very earliest hour, her heart had been seared and her mind degraded by the worldly maxims of her lady-mother; and she had now no clearer notions of the moral and religious principles on which the respectable portion of mankind rely for their personal government, than a blind man of the hues of the rainbow. She loved her sister tenderly upon instinct; but as to all the rest of the world, she regarded them as puppets to be moved by the impulses of

her own selfish cunning. Endowed by nature with a sensitive heart and vivid temperament, she had so thoroughly subdued their impulses by the paltry vanities of selfish egotism, that she would have allied herself without hesitation to any man capable of placing her at the head of a brilliant establishment, and gifting her with a fitting tribute of diamonds, plate, equipages, and precedence in society.

She rose, after a night of sleepless self-examination, neither softened, nor humbled, nor inclined to adopt a more modest and feminine course of existence; but nerved to bear with firm defiance the sneers of the world; and to redouble the activity of her measures with a view to the ultimate success of their matrimonial speculations. Such was the boldness of spirit and hardness of heart which the guidance of a better mother might have exalted into moral courage!—into the noble fortitude that shrinks not from encounter with the allotted evils of life.

Her first object was to learn from the Morning Post what degree of publicity had been already thrown upon the intended alliance of the Duke of Lisborough. Her continental education had not prevented her from becoming aware that an English nobleman of any importance cannot be afflicted with the slightest cold, or afflict other people with the most boring of family dinners, without finding himself the immediate hero of a paragraph. In Italy, an event of this description would have furnished the gossip of the Opera-boxes for six months, without the chance of becoming public property; but in England, where newspaper literature forms a mental dram, whose stimulus is coveted from the palace to the village inn, it was inevitable, that the history of the "PROJECTED HYMENEALS IN HIGH LIFE" should come flying all abroad, on the wings of all the journals, within four-and-twenty hours from the date of their original projection.

Miss Willingham was fortunate in obtaining a piece of consolatory intelligence from the very same newspaper that set forth the bulletin of the Duke's inconstancy. Lord Stapylford had breathed his last!—and she gratified herself with the consideration that Lady Monteagle and Lady Dynevour would be too busily occupied with their own

bombasin and broad hems—with the jointure of the new dowager and the delinquencies of the new lord—to bestow their sympathising tediousness upon their injured friends in Seymour Street; or their patient hearing upon Lady Maria's indiscreet Jeremiades, and unfeeling abuse of her children. Eleanor immediately resolved to procure, if possible, her aunt De Vesci as a listening-stock to the grievances of the day; being persuaded that *she* would nod in appeasing acquiescence with every murmur and every complaint; and forget every word uttered by her irritated niece, long before she had reached the mahogany portals of her mansion in Portman Square. Her next measure was a visit of enquiry to Claudia's dressing-room, whom she had left in a leaden slumber, the result of laudanum; and whose mind she was becoming eager to excite to a spirit of self-sustainment equally courageous with her own. She had very little hope, however, of accomplishing so desirable an end. Claudia was naturally indolent and unresisting; easily depressed, and constitutionally timid.

What, therefore, was Eleanor's amazement on entering her sister's diminutive chamber, to find her seated before the glass in the last stage of Mademoiselle Céline's most elaborate efforts, in high spirits, and still higher beauty.

"Where have you been, dearest Nelly, at this early hour?"

"To the De Vescis'—to persuade our worthy old sleep-walker to take mamma a long airing in the suburbs. She will be here at two o'clock, and we shall have the morning to ourselves."

"And to what purpose?—You might just as well have allowed her the satisfaction of a grumbling soliloquy at home. Lady Robert has written to offer us her horses to ride this morning; and to say that Lady Desmond and Barbara will call for us at four."

"How kindly arranged on her part!—There is nothing she resigns so reluctantly as her ride; and a canter on the turf was the very thing I was wishing to procure you, as the best remedy for a heavy head or heavy heart."

"You do me less than justice!—Believe me I am

guiltless of either. However, I accepted Lady Robert's proposal with pleasure; offered her my congratulations in my note of thanks, and now I am prepared to appear both merry and wise, to all the morning visiters who may feel inclined to honour us, in the interval, with their scrutiny and criticisms."

"Thank God, I find you prepared to act with so much promptitude, and so much proper pride," said Eleanor, affectionately kissing her forehead. But she started back on discovering that, in spite of her sister's healthful bloom and sparkling eyes, her brow was burning and beating with the unnatural pulsation of feverish excitement. She forebore, however, to comment on the discovery, for she perceived that Claudia was intent on deceiving the whole world; and suspected that perhaps she had succeeded in misleading her secret self, as to the nature of her own feelings.

On establishing themselves in the drawing-room, they had the comfort of perceiving that Lady Maria's vehemence had raved itself into sulky silence. She had composed her features into an air of patient martyrdom, and betook herself soon afterwards to the airing offered by Mrs. de Vesci, after the fashion of a saintly victim. Scarcely had she departed, when Lady Willingham arrived in all the exultation of gratified spite. She had not felt happy from the moment that Mary had despatched her negative to Sir William Wyndham, until that which acquainted her that Lady Maria's ambition had been laid low in the dust, and that the conduct of Lady Monteagle's dissolute grandson had made itself the theme of newspaper commentation. She came prepared to hint, and insinuate, and condole; — and Mary, who was painfully aware of the ungenerous character of her mother's views on this occasion, had accompanied her solely in the intention of pouring balm into any wounds she might be tempted to inflict.

But scarcely were they seated when Claudia, without embarrassment or circumlocution, alluded to the Duke of Lisborough's marriage as the news of the day; assuring her aunt and cousin that Lady Anastasia Burgoyne was

the most interesting girl in London; that she would form a charming addition to the Calmersfield society; and that, from the moment of her presentation to them by their dear Lady Grayfield, they had pointed her out as exactly the person calculated to become Duchess of Lisborough. Mary's cheeks became flushed with pleasure on discovering her cousin's feelings to be so differently affected from what she had imagined: Lady Willingham was fairly silenced and overcrowed by the boldness of her niece's *sang froid*; and even Eleanor herself was astonished. She had always relied far more upon her own tactics than upon those of Claudia, in the course of their domestic management; but she now felt inclined to resign the palm without further contestation.

Nor did her amazement decrease when she beheld Claudia, in all the brilliant triumph of her beauty, occupying the general attention of the fashionable group of equestrians to which they were attached for the afternoon. Indifferent to her usual apprehensions, she managed Lady Robert Lorton's spirited Arabian with the most fearless grace. Instead of the listless apathy she had accustomed herself to display, since her arrival in England, to every one saving the favoured Lisborough, she had now assumed an air of joyous animation and general affability, which imparted a new character to her loveliness; and before they reached the extremity of the Park, Lord Cosmo had deserted Lady Barbara Desmond's side; Sir George Wolryche's ringing laugh formed an unintermitting echo to her sallies — and Mr. Tichborne, detaching himself from Lady Barringhurst's party, which they encountered by the way, followed in the wake of the beautiful being whose equestrian grace he declared to be unrivalled, saving by the lovely Centauress of the Grecian gem.

Eleanor was delighted by this very unexpected triumph. She overheard the absurdity of the Duke of Lisborough's choice the topic of universal satire. Wolryche protested that Maraban was engaged in inventing satin leading-strings, and Mechlin bibs and tuckers for her grace's *trousseau*; — and Henry Mulgrave deposed to having seen the model of a *bonbonnière* at Rundell's, on which

the finest diamonds of the Lorton casket were to be set for her use. All the men of the party were congregated round Claudia; and a place was consequently vacant at her own fair side for the monopoly of Sir William Wyndham, whose red face, blue coat, and buff waistcoat she soon saw advancing towards her, and who listened with some impatience to the Lisborough debate.

"Don't you think it very hard, Miss Willingham," said he, with a solemn air and emphasis, "that a man can't marry according to his own liking, without being hauled over the coals in this sort of way?"

"Hauled over the coals!" reiterated Eleanor, to whom the domestic idioms of England were not particularly familiar.

"Without being brought to book by persons who have no right either to meddle or make in the business?"

Eleanor, who was aware that her honourable friend was one of the most eminent "country gentlemen speakers" in the House, found herself rather puzzled by his eloquence.

"For my own part," resumed Sir William, "I own myself to be downright Dunstable; and what I say is, that where friends are agreeable, and the young lady not averse, there is nothing like making hay while the sun shines; and if the world chooses to have its laugh — why let it. If I could be married to-morrow after my own choosing, by Jupiter, I should care no more for the jeers of my club, than for a hard rain after a harvest."

"The Duke of Lisborough has made a choice extremely gratifying to his family and friends," observed Eleanor Willingham, anxious that the proposal which she feared would follow the preamble should be made in a somewhat less public position. "Lady Anastasia Burgoyne is a niece of his sister, Lady Grayfield's, and the Duke has known her from her infancy."

"Ay, ay; — training and pedigree all in her favour! — to judge of the kitling you should know something of the cat and her breed. A vastly sensible woman is that Lady Grayfield — no flummery about her. I sit next pew to her at church; and I observe that she is not

ashamed of making her responses as audible as the clerk's."

"It is fortunate that all the congregation are not equally fond of hearing their own voices," said Eleanor.

"For my own part," continued Sir William, replying to his own train of reflections, "I *will* say that I abominate the sight of a real high-flying woman of fashion, with her rouge, and *écarté* and flirting, and what not. Now, there's that daughter of my worthy neighbour, Lady Monteagle — Lady Stapylford I mean; — a fine kettle of fish *she* has made of it! For full ten years after Margaret Monteagle married, it was Lady Stapylford here — Lady Stapylford there — who but Lady Stapylford! — Lady Stapylford's new chariot at the birth-day — Lady Stapylford's masked balls — Lady Stapylford's diamonds at Carlton House — were as regular matters for newspaper discussion as the Slave Trade, or the annual debate on Emancipation. And all this time, how was her family going on, I should like to know? — My lord was either at Newmarket, or playing hundred-guinea-whist, by daylight, at Brookes's; — her hopeful son was tying fireworks to his tutor's pigtail; and her half-starved servants, baulked of their board-wages, were forced to live on the venison and pine-apple left from her ladyship's entertainments. The consequence is, that the Stapylford estate is mortgaged up to its ears; and when the young lord comes of age, he will be obliged to sell his fine Yorkshire property, or completely strip the Stapylford Park woods to clear off his own scores with the Jews. And so much for the management of a woman of fashion."

"By your own account," said Eleanor, laughing at his vehemence, "the blame, in this instance, lies chiefly with the *gentlemen* of the family."

"A bad wife is sure to make a bad husband. If the sun won't shine, a fig for the crop."

"The present Lord Stapylford is a very fine young man."

"*Fine?* — a mere milksop! looks just like Madame Vestris in boy's clothes in a farce. *Fine?* — a mere frivolous silk-worm!"

"You do not appear partial to the family. I am surprised, however, to hear you tax Lord Stapylford with effeminacy; for we hear of him constantly at Melton, at prize-fights, and steeple-chases. Lady Monteagle's chief complaint against her grandson is that he prefers a rat-hunt to the opera."

"That is just a lady's idea of manliness! — A lad, like Stapylford, has a whole stable of hunters put off upon him, which he cannot ride, either by some rogue of a horse-dealer, or some greater rogue of a fashionable friend; and down he goes to Melton to have them broke, or broke down, by all the crack riders of the hunt; while *he* stays at home, drinking iced whisky punch, and playing hazard; — having paid through the nose, with *post obit* bonds, for a stud which he scarce even sees till it comes to the hammer in a spring sale at Tattersall's."

Miss Willingham, who perceived that Mr. Tichborne was lending a sly ear to this delicate investigation, would gladly have changed the topic of discourse; but Sir William seldom bestowed his attention except upon the mute arguments of his own mill-wheel of a mind.

"As to the prize-fights, rat-hunts, and steeple-chases, the boy knows as much about them as you do. He is taken there by his cursed rascals of tuft-hunting toadies — like a pigeon in a trap — only to be made a mark of; and is brought back in a hack tandem, to an eight o'clock dinner at Long's, prating about Jacko Mackacko, and a loser by some thousands on the long odds."

A sneer that passed between Tichborne and Lord Cosmo, as the echoes of this neat and appropriate discourse reached their ears, brought a blush of shame to the cheek of Eleanor Willingham. "When I become Lady Wyndham," thought she, "I must certainly borrow Papageno's padlock, to secure those boorish lips. At all events, I will take care to amend his taste for riding in the Park, or commenting upon the movements of civilised Christians."

"What party is that before us?" enquired Eleanor, aloud, of Lord Cosmo Somerset, resolved to divert the conversation into another channel.

"Oh! that is Lady Radbourne — obliged to hold on

her hat while she bends her ear to poor old prosing Lord Botherby, whom she worships because his grand-daughter is a patroness of Almack's. I would hazard a bet that he is favouring her ladyship with a topographical plan of the riots of eighty; or resuscitating some pithy observation of 'my esteemed friend, the late Charles Wyndham.'"

"And that noisy set who are making a coasting tour of the Serpentine?"

"Do you not recognise old Lorimer, on his yeomanry charger, and his little pee-wits of daughters on their ponies? He looks like a solemn seventy-four, convoying a fleet of cockle shells!"

"Or like a grey gander, protecting his covey of goslings," replied Eleanor. "At the distance of a mile one might identify the cackling of the Lorimer gamut."

"I always fancied the Miss Lorimers were particular friends of yours," interposed the astonished Sir William.

"They *are* friends, and distant cousins," replied Eleanor, calmly; "which is the reason I take the liberty of abusing them. I should be sorry to leave the foibles of my family in the hands of strangers."

The sun was now sinking low — the Park was getting thin — and Sir William Wyndham hungry. "I have promised Lady Robert Lorton to escort you no further than her house," said Lady Desmond to the Willinghams. "She wants you to dine with her; and has, I believe, procured your mother's sanction, your maid's assistance, and your evening dress."

The girls, who desired nothing so eagerly as an escape from home, readily acquiesced; and as Sir William assisted Eleanor from her horse in Arlington Street, he failed not to breathe in her ear the ominous, but expected, whisper, — "At what o'clock shall I find Lady Maria at home to-morrow?"

"We are always visible at two!" replied Miss Willingham, blushing with disgust at the awkward assiduities of a man whom she had already determined to accept as the wedded partner of her future life — as her inevitable companion through time and through eternity!

Ten minutes afterwards she had almost forgotten his existence, among the varied excitements and elegant joyousness of Lady Robert's fascinating circle.

CHAPTER IV.

I do not reserve all my compassion for the griefs that stalk in huskins. When people's griefs are of that dignity and public character, they can lay them in state, sing solemn dirges over them, inter them with funeral pomp, and set up a superb monument of them. They taste the "*luxury* of woe;" but the griefs that must be privately buried in the breast are the most bitter.

MRS. MONTAGU'S *Letters.*

THERE were various reasons which rendered the coterie in Arlington Street more than commonly agreeable on the day in question. The party was an *impromptu;* — having been formed in the course of the morning, after Lord Robert's departure for his Buckinghamshire estate, where he was in the habit of enjoying the first appearance of the May-fly every spring; and where, on the present occasion, he was bent upon the solitary enjoyment of his own ill humour. It was highly improbable that the most speckled trout, or Leviathanic pike, would charm him from the remembrance of the forfeited reversion of a ducal coronet, and one hundred and twenty thousand per annum!

His good-natured but listless wife, who sympathised more with his affliction than with its motive, became suddenly anxious to disguise the real nature of his feelings. Summoning, therefore, all her enchantments around her, she improvisated a little *fête*, as if in honour of the projected alliance of her brother in-law; and as her indolent nature was positively excited and amused by the whole affair — by Lady Grayfield's able manœuvring, and Lisborough's easy dupery — she appeared in far more than her usual spirits, and exercised a double share of her usual fascinations. The little circle, readily receiving the infection of her buoyant gaiety, and relieved from a high-pressure engine of dulness by the absence of Lord Robert

Lorton, formed an electric chain, emitting sparkles of incessant brilliancy; — and Claudia and Eleanor, who had urgent motives for assuming an aspect of gladness, were not slow to contribute to the colloquial animation and varying diversions of the evening.

Bout-rimés, ballads (*mis en action*), acted charades, and proverbs, and *tableaux*, succeeded each other; till Lady Barbara Desmond, the listless Lady Barringhurst, Lady Rachael Verney, and even Mrs. Grandison, although usually vivacious and agile as a bird, cried eagerly for a respite; which was agreeably occupied by Henry Mulgrave and his guitar, Lord Cosmo Somerset's inimitable mimicries, Sir Comyne's lively anecdotes of other lands, and Mr. Tichborne's piquant edition of the scandals of his own.

It was an unpleasing interruption when the carriage came to fetch them home;—to that home which was wearisome from its paltry mediocrity — loathsome as the parliament of their matrimonial plots and conspiracies — and awful at the present crisis as the den of the maternal tigress, whose irritations were appalling even to her kindred cubs. They prepared themselves to find the countenance of Lady Maria, on their return to Seymour Street, lowering and portentous as an April thundercloud!

Great and startling, therefore, was their delight, on finding themselves greeted as "her dearest children!" and caressed and flattered as tenderly as when basking in the warmest sunshine of their Calmersfield popularity!

"You had a tolerably pleasant dinner at the general's?" enquired Eleanor.

"Very passable — far less boring than usual; — and you, my love?"

"*Our* party was delightful."

"Any thing new?—any gossip of to-day?"

"A ball at Lady Radbourne's next week; and a majority against ministers to-night in the commons."

"What have we to do with such trash as Lady Radbourne, or the House? My information has been more to the purpose."

Eleanor drew a chair towards the table, and affected to busy herself with the visiting tickets, the result of her

morning's absence, which lay on the table in a gilded standish.

"Your uncle De Vesci — extremely enraged by the Duke of Lisborough's conduct, and somewhat touched by my hint that his own interference has been materially instrumental in our disappointment — has sent you a bank-bill for five hundred pounds, to provide against a very brilliant *fête* which he purposes giving immediately, in order that *we* may invite the company, and profit during the remainder of the season by the popularity it will purchase!"

"Five hundred pounds! — My dear mamma! It is a perfect fortune! Think of all the trinkets it will purchase!"

"In the next place I have the pleasure of informing you, that the Duke of Lisborough's affairs are horribly involved; that he marries Lady Anastasia Burgoyne chiefly for the temporary relief to be afforded by her fifty thousand pounds; and that they are going abroad to economise, immediately after the ceremony."

"Involved! — the Duke of Lisborough! — Impossible, my dear mamma! — Consider for a moment his rent-roll and resources!"

"Consider also his profuse expenditure; — his taste for building and *écarté* — and the strict entail by which his hands are tied. He has no command of ready money — no power of raising it, except on ruinous terms — and the system of exorbitant interest once commenced, there is no end to its aggravation of evil. In short, Sir Robert Westland, who sat next me to-day at dinner, assures me that his grace's bonds are good for little or nothing in the city; and that this silly marriage of his is generally regarded as a mere pecuniary arrangement."

"Without yielding the least faith to such an opinion, I own I am delighted that it should prevail; for whether true or false, it renders a very satisfactory and healing balsam to Claudia's feelings, and our own pride."

"And in the third place, my dear Eleanor, I learned from Sir Peter Westland, the fat commissioner, who never misses his trot round the Park, that Sir William Wyndham

was your constant attendant this morning; — that your approaching marriage is the theme of general discourse; and that his estates in Kent average a clear twenty thousand a year."

"He is, without exception, the most ill-bred fool — the most self-opinionated boor I ever beheld!" exclaimed Eleanor, by way of probing her mother's feelings.

"Now pray let me hear no fastidious nonsense of that description," replied Lady Maria, peevishly. "A girl in your dependent situation should not presume to make exceptions; for what would become of both you and your sister, I should like to know, in case of my death? Do you think you should be happier or more respectable spunging as a poor relation at Heddeston Court — or maintaining your own rank in life at the head of Sir William Wyndham's princely establishment?"

"Loathing my husband — neglecting his children — and watching every day for an increase of plethoric symptoms on his full-moon visage, in the hope of approaching apoplexy!"

"Eleanor! — Eleanor!"

"I should certainly order his ale and soup to be annually strengthened, in the hope of accelerating the affair; or perhaps bring myself within reach of the penalties of the law, by tightening his white cotton cravat while he is snoring after a long day's run with the hounds."

"I cannot listen to these offensive rhapsodies; — such observations are infinitely disgusting."

"Will you listen to one which is considerably more so in *my* estimation? — Will you listen to my assurance that I have firmly resolved to accept Sir William Wyndham; and that I have promised him a private audience to-morrow, at two o'clock, here — in this very house?"

"My dearest Eleanor!" exclaimed Lady Maria, rising and embracing her, "*now* you speak like a girl of sense and feeling, such as I always took you to be! Accept him? Who for a moment could doubt it? So desirable a connection! — an unencumbered estate of twenty thousand a year!"

"Unencumbered? — with that mass of mortality attached to the demesne?"

"My dear! I have the greatest respect for Sir William; — your poor dear father always looked up to Wyndham Park as the first property in the country; — always supported the late Sir Roger throughout his elections. Nay — at one time they talked of setting up an opposition pack of fox-hounds between them. I am convinced that nothing would have afforded poor dear Sir Charles, and even poor old Sir Claude, so much gratification as an alliance between one of their descendants and Wyndham Park."

"If that descendant, *like* the park, were a mere mass of clods, I could sympathise in their triumph. Unfortunately she chances to be endued with sensibilities which may hereafter render both the park and its proprietor very vexatious appendages."

"Now, my sweet Eleanor ——"

"My dear mamma! — with *you* — allow me to be candid! — I will play my part to admiration in presence of the world; but I shall revenge myself *on* myself by always confessing to my mother that I abhor and despise my husband."

"I will leave Sir William and his family diamonds to plead their own cause," said Lady Maria, affecting to laugh off her secret confusion and dismay at Eleanor's vehemence. "And now, my dear child, let me beg of you to go to bed, and compose your spirits, in order that at Sir William's visit to-morrow, your own bright eyes may rival the brilliancy of his family diamonds."

"Claudia has been gone these ten minutes," replied Eleanor, deliberately lighting her candle, and kissing her hand to her mother. "I fear my poor sister's spirits will be more difficult of composure than mine."

On reaching her own apartment, Eleanor received from the smiling lips of Mademoiselle Céline a message from her sister, saying that she had retired to rest with a severe headache, and begged not to be disturbed; on which, having given her orders for the morrow, and dismissed her attendant, she threw herself into an arm-chair to indulge in half an hour's reverie — a circumstance of rare occurrence with the lively Eleanor Willingham. And whither strayed those visionary thoughts — to whom — to what —

reverted her recollections — as she sat twining the raven tresses between her unconscious fingers, and strove to chide away the blush that rose unbidden to her cheek? — Was it Frederick Lorimer's voice that seemed to tingle in her ears as she shuddered at the thought of the morrow's wooing? — was it *his* grace of person, *his* elegance of person, *his* playfulness of spirit that arrayed the uprising phantom, which appeared as if interposed between herself and happiness? — Did any whispered vows of youthful love steal back upon her soul as she clasped her hands together in sudden agony? — Yes! Frederick was avenged! — there were tears in her eyes — despair in her heart! — She felt that the happiness of her innocent youth was departing from her; — that she was about to sacrifice her own self-esteem — and for ever!

With hasty impatience she arose, and began hurriedly to disencumber herself of her evening ornaments. "For these, and baubles such as these," murmured Eleanor, as she heaped them in glittering confusion upon her dressing-table, "I am about to renounce the peace and respectability of my future existence. Henceforth no solitude — no communing with myself — no trust in my own rectitude! — I shall, my very self, be the first to appreciate the indelicacy, the knavery of my own conduct, and to despise Eleanor Wyndham as she will deserve to be despised."

She started! — for a low moan of pain, or of distress, appeared to proceed from her sister's adjoining chamber. Throwing on her mantle, she prepared to infringe upon Claudia's prohibition: — in a moment she was standing by her bedside.

"My dear — dear sister!" she whispered in a soothing voice; — but a faint murmur of despondency was still the only reply.

Astonished and alarmed, Eleanor returned into her own room for a light, which enabled her to perceive her afflicted sister sitting up in bed with an air of wild unconsciousness, and rocking herself backwards and forwards, as if to subdue the sense of pain.

"You are ill, dearest Claudia," again whispered Elea-

nor, while the most terrible apprehensions took possession of her mind.

Claudia waved her head, as if in negative reply; but neither spoke, nor discontinued her movements.

"Speak — sister; — tell me, I beseech you — what can I do to relieve you?"

"Nothing!" answered Claudia, in a hollow voice; "nothing — nothing!" and she smote her hands despairingly upon her bosom.

Eleanor, dreading that her sister's reason was departing from her, threw herself upon the pillow behind her, clasped her in her arms, and drew her head gently towards her own bosom. "My dear sister," she faltered, "remember that if you persist in this horrible silence, I must call for other assistance. Surely you would not wish that any one beside your own Eleanor should witness your present condition."

But her kindness had more influence on the sufferer than her threats; in a moment she found the warm tears of Claudia falling upon her hands! Again she pressed her sister's throbbing brow tenderly towards her. "Claudia — Claudia!" she exclaimed, "if you have any pity upon me — if you have any confidence in my affection — relieve my mind from its vague terrors. — What can have agitated you thus?"

"And do *you* ask me?" faltered Claudia Willingham at length, with a gasping voice. "Do you not know that he is about to be united to another?"

"The Duke — the Duke of Lisborough?"

Claudia pressed her sister's hand in assent.

"Good God! and can disappointed ambition prevail thus over your reason? — Can the loss of mere worldly distinction thus agonise a human heart?"

"Oh, Eleanor!"

"I can scarcely forgive you — Claudia, scarcely sympathise with you! Surely a woman's pride ought to render her superior to such paltry weakness. Regard the affair as a game of skill, at which you have been defeated, but do not waste your tears upon a matter of mere interest."

"Of *mere* interest!—how little do you know me!"

"Of what else?—you cannot have *loved* the Duke of Lisborough?"

Again Claudia Willingham smote her hands upon her bosom. "Fondly—passionately!" she murmured. "Yet till I was hopeless of return, I had rather died than own it."

Eleanor leaned back against the pillow in utter consternation. She could neither discredit nor comprehend her sister's assertion. "When we last spoke together upon this subject——" she began.

"It is very long since!" interrupted Claudia. "I remember it well—it was at Calmersfield. Three months form a period capable of changing the opinions or feelings of any woman."

"Yet you might have been more candid with your sister;—you might have acquainted me with your altered views as they gradually arose."

"I was in daily hopes of receiving some declaration from Lisborough, which might seem to excuse the unclaimed devotion of my heart towards him. And even *you*, Eleanor, ask yourself whether you were more explicit with *me*, relative to Frederick Lorimer and your intentions."

"My dear Claudia! we have been both to blame," replied Eleanor, frankly offering her the hand she had withdrawn in a momentary movement of vexation. "But tell me, love—for all this is still incomprehensible to my mind—tell me, if it be not too painful to you, how long you have loved this odious man, and why have you hitherto so scrupulously concealed it from me?"

"Because I saw that you disliked and despised him. *I*, you know, Nelly, never was gifted with your talents; I have always been less difficult and more forbearing than yourself, even in the choice of our acquaintance. In Italy, I used to laugh and dance with the Duke of Lisborough, without distinguishing him from others, because I thought, and felt, and acted as a child; and because at that time the ideas of love and marriage had never entered my head, ex-

cept as things remote and visionary, and solely connected with our return to England."

"It is very true;—and we were both happier then, were we not, dearest Claudia? We lived but to amuse ourselves, without bestowing a care on these plots and cabals of mamma's, which *have* formed, and will form, our bane through life."

"It was in the same frame of mind we first visited Calmersfield. We saw every one labouring to attract the duke's attention; and the probability of his bestowing his hand upon another, was the first thing that warned me of my own predilection in his favour. I remember well that a twinge of jealousy first betrayed my secret to myself."

"Would to Heaven you had never chanced to make so unfortunate a discovery!"

"I will not say that the favourable prejudice attached to his rank and brilliant position did not tend to heighten the character of my feelings, and to suggest the emulation with others by which I sought to attract and fix his notice. But from the time that I *did* attract it—from the moment that I fancied I *had* fixed it—I loved him for himself, and himself only!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Eleanor, clasping her hands together with irrepressible vexation; "that empty, stupid, disagreeable man!"

Claudia laid a gentle but reproving hand upon her lips. "My dear sister! spare me! or I shall proceed no further with my confession."

Eleanor kissed the cold hand thus interposed, and promised forbearance.

"No woman," observed Claudia, "can judge of the merits or captivations of any man till he has appeared before her in the character of a lover. Had I seen and known Lisborough but as he moves in general society, I should have continued to regard him as pompous, and tiresome, and uninteresting. But these visible defects arise less from his natural *hauteur* than from a degree of personal shyness which few suspect in him;—which he cannot repress, and therefore attempts to veil under a mask of stately reserve. In his intimacy with myself he ventured to throw off that

mask — to appear in his natural character — a character but too fascinating — too enchanting for my happiness."

Again Eleanor made a movement expressive of impatience.

"You may remember, Nelly, that at Calmersfield we two were always *tête-à-tête*, whether in its crowded evening *réunion*, or in the morning solitude of its walks and gardens. In these interviews, his heart — at least I thought so then — was unreservedly laid open before me. He spoke to me of the hollow coldness of his position in the world — of the mistrust with which it inspired him — of the fastidious delicacy of his feelings towards women, and of his dread of awaking from some dream of fancied affection, to find that it had been solely prompted by his extrinsic qualifications. I am persuaded that at that period he was both conscious of the existence of mine, and confident of the disinterestedness of its devotion."

"Fool! to fling away the possession of a jewel he so little deserved, and which will never be vouchsafed him from any other quarter! — But why, dear Claudia, why were you at that time so reserved with me on the subject?"

"I saw that you undervalued the duke; and feared that you would persist in misinterpreting the nature of my own feelings. With mamma I was more ingenuous."

"And what were her sapient counsels on so delicate an occasion?"

"To hazard every thing in order to secure a proposal. She told me, that with any other man, nothing was so politically important as the observation of the strictest delicacy; that, with any *other*, my first object should be to maintain the semblance of indifference. But that the duke had been so long accustomed to the officious importunities of interested women, and had habituated himself to the exaction of such unceasing incense and homage, that he would consider me cold, and stern, and heartless, if I persevered in affecting unconsciousness of his regard."

"Wretched sophistry! — as if the delicate prompting of a womanly nature was not the best guide on such occasions."

"She bade me beware of listening, Nelly, to *your*

flighty arguments, and lofty opinions. I am persuaded that she is rather afraid of your downright frankness on many occasions; and I own that, for a time, she inspired me with a similar alarm."

"But the duke——"

"At her instigation, I no longer laboured to conceal my preference. He was, alas! I fear only too fully aware of my affection; and, at first, it appeared to redouble his own predilection in my favour. When I left Calmersfield, we were all but declared lovers. Every hour, every minute, I expected a formal proposal to mamma; nor, had he been a beggar, and I an empress, could I have awaited his measures with a fonder degree of disinterested tenderness."

Eleanor rose, and hastily traversed the room: — she could scarcely repress her feelings of indignation. · "And the change? — have you no clue to its origin?"

"Alas! I might fairly answer, 'None!' for my own vague suspicions have been my only guide. But you are as well aware as myself that we have many enemies, and very few friends who would have looked upon my elevation with a favourable eye. It appears that mamma's character as a manœuvrer is generally recognised in society; the whole business was looked upon as a speculation; — even *you*, Nelly, were sceptical touching the possible existence of my affection for Lisborough; — Lady Grayfield, Lord Robert, and all their shuffling clan, were busy in their reports of our poverty, and ambition, and baseness of spirit; and the duke having once learned to regard himself as a dupe, began to think with disgust of me, and of the whole affair. That horrible ball at Lisborough House! — shall I ever — ever forget it?"

"Yet how well you succeeded in deceiving me and all the world! On my honour, Claudia — on my honest word, I believed the Duke of Lisborough to be utterly indifferent to your feelings — saving as the proprietor of Calmersfield, and as the best match in England."

Miss Willingham pressed her hands despairingly upon her bosom. "A woman's pride is an urgent preceptor! — but look, Nelly — ever since the painful moment that served to undeceive me — even thus have I been affected." She

drew her white handkerchief across her lips, and held it towards her sister stained and moistened with blood.—Eleanor started.

"What it has cost me to disguise and subdue my feelings, I trust you may never know; for it is a lesson that experience alone can teach. I have never slept, Eleanor;—I have rested neither by day nor by night; and all this agony has been endured with a smiling countenance, mocking and redoubling my anguish."

"Ungrateful idiot that he is!" said her sister, vehemently. "May he atone for the sorrow he has caused you upon a pillow of thorns!"

"Hush! hush! hush!—will you never learn to appreciate the nature of my feelings towards him?—I am not mortified, Nelly—I am *not* disappointed;—his coronet and his fortune I resign without one movement of regret;—I am only most unhappy—most miserable——" she paused—oppressed by her emotions, and again Eleanor kindly took her hand.

"While I had any reason to believe that the change in Lisborough's conduct arose from wanton caprice—from the mere cruel inconstancy of human nature—my pride armed my courage to meet the blow. I did not sink *then*, dear Nelly. You cannot upbraid we with having shrunk beneath mamma's unkind revilings, or the thousand impertinences which I saw on the point of being levelled against us. But the news of to-day I cannot nerve myself to bear so easily!—To think of *him* as a victim equally miserable with myself—to see *him* condemned to sacrifice *his* feelings to the painful exigencies of worldly wants——"

Eleanor interrupted her with indignant impatience. "And can you really be the dupe of such trifling and manifest misrepresentation?" said she. "The Duke of Lisborough is confessed to be one of the most opulent subjects in Europe. His affairs are involved—his rent-roll diminished—the immediate claims upon his resources are perplexingly urgent;—grant it—grant it all;—although we know it but from the gossiping reports of one

of those upstart Westlands — a man living absolutely without the pale of good society."

"And therefore the more to be trusted," interposed Claudia, gently. "A mere man of business knows the peril of trifling with people's pecuniary reputations. I should not believe Sir Robert Westland's report of a fashionable marriage; — I do of a fashionable mortgage — it is his vocation."

"That point I have already conceded. But even supposing the duke to be embarrassed to a most degrading and improbable degree, think you that had he been attached to you with a true, and honest, and fervent affection, he would not have found ample means to gratify his wishes? — He knows that *his* poverty is wealth to us — that we are not princesses of the empire, to be wooed with principalities and argosies. If it be his destiny to live in expatriation, *you* might as easily have accompanied him in his exile as Lady Anastasia Burgoyne; — nay, he was well aware that you would have even *preferred* a residence on the Continent to Calmersfield and all its glories."

"With *him* I could have been happy any where."

"Then never again tell me that he loved you," cried Eleanor, with generous indignation. "Had he nourished one grain of pure attachment, he would have been aware of yours; and seeing it, he would have braved all risks and difficulties to make you his wife. Do not let his pecuniary embarrassments be a cloak to the naked truth; — a man with his revenues is beyond the personal reach of their pressure. No! no! he never truly loved you."

"Eleanor! — if *you* love *me*, you will not say that again," faltered Claudia, in a low concentrated voice, while her cheeks became blanched to a death-like pallour, and her trembling lips were again suffused with their former unsightly tinge.

"Compose yourself, dear sister," said Eleanor, soothingly, as she wiped away the sanguine drops.

"I cannot — if you persist in saying that he did not love me! — I can bear to believe that circumstances compelled him to resign my affection, but not that he wilfully deceived me!"

"Ah! what will mother have to answer for," exclaimed Eleanor, wringing her hands, "in having permitted, in having urged you to cherish this hopeless, this unavailing attachment? *She* knew the peril of your position;—she saw that the happiness of your whole future life was hazarded on the die; and yet, for her own ambition's sake, she urged you to dare the danger. My mother would have seen her children pass through fire to Moloch, had she but been secure of profiting by the sacrifice."

"He will be miserable with Lady Anastasia," said Claudia, musingly, and without sharing in her sister's outbreak of angry feeling. "The Burgoynes are totally wanting in the refinement to which he has accustomed himself till it has become essential to his happiness. She will shock all his prejudices—disappoint all his selfish exactions;—and when he finds that he has married a mere tool of Lady Grayfield's—he who has such a terror of being duped—he will become disgusted, and endure at least as much vexation and regret as he must secretly know that he has allotted as my own future destiny!"

"May your augury be fulfilled—and you will be nobly avenged!"

"I shall never make you feel and think as *I* do, Nelly! —While he is happy, I shall bear my lot with patience; but let me know him to be repining and wretched, and my courage will fail me. Alas! I hardly yet know all I may have to suffer."

"Claudia!" said her sister, gravely, "you have better feelings in your heart than I have hitherto found in mine. You deserved not that this blow should fall upon you;—*I*, who have profited so much more deeply by Lady Maria's lessons—I, who have so callous and so worldly a heart, might have borne it better. You saw how it resisted Frederick Lorimer's disinterested affection, and its own warm impulses; and you shall see it do yet more wondrous things. I love nothing but you, sister!—and I *will* love nothing else;—trust to me, dearest Claudia, to devote all my time and thoughts to your comfort and consolation;—trust to my unceasing efforts to watch over your failing health, and to drive the remembrance of this worthless man

from your bosom." She threw her arms around the sufferer, and embraced her tenderly as she spoke.

"And my mother!—Oh! Eleanor, think of all the unkindness—all the taunts—all the mortifications I shall have to endure from mamma!"

"Not long, Claudia!—you will not have to bear them long. I have the prospect of a permanent, and if not a *happy*, at least a respectable home, by marrying Sir William Wyndham."

"But you are not in earnest; you cannot intend to sacrifice yourself to that vulgar boor—to a man you so utterly despise!"

"Enough!—the measure is resolved upon; and his chance is the more favourable, that I am sadly out of conceit just now with delicacy and refinement. Before this hour to-morrow, I shall have accepted the veriest bore in England; and remember, dearest Claudia, that I have bespoken your society and companionship in mitigation of the desolate splendours of my gilded cage. Be well—be happy—my dear, dear sister—and I will bear my own destiny without a murmur."

Again the half-exhausted Claudia would have remonstrated; but Eleanor, who saw all the dangers of her perturbation, peremptorily obliged her to lie down, and compose herself to rest. Then drawing a chair to her couch, she watched by her bedside until the miserable girl had sobbed herself into a heavy and unnatural sleep.

CHAPTER V.

Rien de plus triste que la mort, et tout ce qui tient à son cortège; c'est une image que peu de gens ont la force de supporter, par la raison que c'est un malheur auquel personne n'a l'espoir de se soustraire. Il n'en est pas moins vrai que le ridicule peut l'atteindre; il y trouve une source de comique que le bon goût ne reprove pas toujours. JOUY.

"It is better," saith the divine precept, "to go into the house of mourning than into the house of feasting." The customs and abuses of modern times have rendered this admonition somewhat difficult of comprehension! The

house of *sorrow* may retain its ancient value as a moral corrective; but the house of mourning—the house of *inheritance*—is often degraded into an arena for the vilest passions, and the basest impulses, which dishonour the human images of an immortal Creator. Such was the mansion of Lord Stapylford!

His lordship had breathed his last with a becoming *cordon sanitaire* of medical advisers round his bed; he had been consigned to the shroud with a degree of professional pomp becoming his rank;—the presidents of two colleges had shed the light of their grim and solemn countenances upon the scene;—the apothecary was an apothecary of *ton;* the cupper was a fashionable cupper. His lordship had departed this life in all the odour of professional sanctity.

But if *two* among the learned faculties had contributed their aid and consolation to Lord Stapylford's departure, the mighty comforts of the *third* had been wholly wanting! His pulse had been periodically and anxiously felt —his will legally signed—but no one had thought for a moment of whispering in his ear that one redeeming word of hope, which forms an anchor of sustainment to the fleeting soul;—no one had dreamed of enquiring into his inward faith—or of suggesting the becoming frame of mind for a departing Christian.—He had died, and *made no sign!*

The two presidents had immediately enquired for their carriages,

> With signs of sorrow,
> Despairing of their fee to-morrow!

The apothecary had departed unto his pharmacy, to add up the sum total of his late lordship's bill, in readiness for the summons of the executors. The family lawyer had ensconced himself, with his tin cases, in a hackney-coach; in order that his clerks might instantly nib their pens for a duplicate of the last will and testament, to be submitted for counsels' opinion; and the sick-nurses, having turned a key upon the chamber of death, were seated in an adjoining apartment "enjoying a comfortable

drop of tea," and jocosely calculating the probable amount of their perquisites. In the servants' hall affairs were yet more merrily arranged; and while the butler was favouring the housekeeper, in the steward's room, with a bottle of his choicest Chambertin, to drink the health of the new lord, John was explaining to Thomas, over a modicum of humble port, that "thank God their troubles were over, and that they should receive their long arrears of board wages from the executors." Twelve hours more, and the merry-men of the undertaker were installed, under authority, throughout the house; again twelve hours, and certain chambers were muffled with black hangings, and lugubriously enlightened by funeral tapers, while all the lower regions were converted into a temple of riot and intemperance.

And where were the widow's tears which should have embalmed the memory of the dead?—where was the filial piety that should have hallowed those shrouded relics from the touch of vulgar profanation?—Margaret, the Lady Dowager Stapylford, the ex-patroness, the withered *élégante*, the former queen of fashion—had rushed instantly, upon the formal announcement of her lord's decease, into a travelling chariot, which was waiting at the door to convey her with her favourite maid, and lap-dog, and sal-volatile, to her mother's dower-house, in Kent; there to remain in the decorous seclusion exacted by *bon ton* and etiquette, until after "the last mournful ceremony;" and Montagu—eighth Lord Stapylford—was giving audience, at Mivart's hotel, to the tailor who was selected for the composition of his mourning! Mr. Tichborne was stationed at his elbow, preparing him with the best instructions in what manner to evade the inquisition of "those cursed bores of executors," and how to parry the cupidity of his widowed mother!

"Those fellows will be wanting you to sign releases, and sanction an increase of jointure; they will recommend that one of the trustees should reside on your Yorkshire estate, and another on the Kentish property, in order to save them from rack and ruin during the remainder of your minority. Depend on it they will not hear of ad-

vancing a shilling towards rescuing you from your own embarrassments;—all the old servants they persuade you to pension off, they will take at half price into their own households; and all the timber they persuade you to cut down, they will purchase at half its value on their own speculation. All that sort of thing is part of a trustee's business.—I know them of old!—I saw how they managed poor Vallerhurst's affairs; fattening upon his undoing—drinking his wine—eating his venison—thinning his preserves; and all upon pretence of diminishing the dowager-widow's responsibility, and doing their duty by the property."

"The deuce of it is that, what with my debts, and my detestation of business, I shall fall cursedly into their power. My mother's trustees were always bullying my father, and getting injunctions against him in Chancery;—and, by the way, I suspect their vexatious interference was chiefly the cause of the ill-blood existing between my illustrious parents;—and now they will pounce upon me, and after inserting their talons into my property beyond my power of disentanglement, will suck the last vital drop that my father's extravagance and my own have left in its veins."

"His lordship talks, Mr. Tichborne," said the familiar man of measures, whose chariot and blood-horses were waiting at the door, "as any young gentleman might, who was overpowered by the first pressure of finding a weighty concern upon his hands, without being properly aware of his own advantages and resources. For my own part, I shall be extremely happy to accommodate his lordship with a thousand or two for his immediate emergencies, on reasonable interest—say twenty-five—or"—watching the expression of Tichborne's eye—"even twenty per cent.—to a good customer."

"By heavens!—Presswell, you are a prime fellow," exclaimed Tichborne, leaping from the sofa on this welcome announcement.

"And if I might presume to advise, his lordship should by no means expose himself to a meeting of the executors—a formality which will probably take place

immediately after the last melancholy ceremony — without being armed against their innovations by the assistance of legal advice of his own seeking. You will excuse me, gentlemen, for this presumption," (simpering, and rolling up his morocco sample-book of shreds and patches,) "but my transactions among persons of a certain rank, upon certain occasions of this melancholy nature, have given me a certain degree of experience ——"

"Which you know how to turn to a *certain* account," interrupted Lord Stapylford. "Well, Presswell — and what do you advise?"

"Oh, my lord — far be it from me — an illiterate man — your lordship's tradesman — and totally unskilled in the intricacies of the law — to venture any thing like serious advice on such a momentous affair. But I presume to remind your lordship, and Mr. Tichborne, that there is my cousin, Nicholas Screw, of Gray's Inn Lane, formerly of the firm of Twig and Screw, of Lincoln's Inn, a very rising young man, and regularly bred to the profession, who has more than once done business for gentlemen of your acquaintance. Lord Vallerhurst, as *you*, Mr. Tichborne, can particularly certify, never stirred in any matter of importance without Screw at his elbow; and I dare not say how many units my cousin was the means of diminishing from the balance-sheet in his lordship's favour, on an audit of the guardianship account."

"Nor how many he was the means of transferring into your rascally pocket, and his own," thought Tichborne. But maugre this unfavourable aside, he dismissed Presswell to his chariot with no darker discouragement than a promise that Lord Stapylford "would take his proposals into consideration."

Now consideration was a dose extremely nauseous to his lordship's palate; and one which, like other patent medicines, he reserved for great emergencies. On the present occasion he was inclined to take as little of it as possible.

"All this is a horrible bore," said he, stretching himself at full length on the sofa, after the obsequious departure of his privy-counsellor of the needle.

"All what?" said Tichborne, who conceived that a

viscounty with twenty thousand a year could be no unwelcome inheritance at any time.

"Why, mourning — and guardians — and executors — and jointures — and a funeral — and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, the bore will be soon over — and then in becoming your own master — you will taste the sweets of your position."

"My valet and all my fellows have been to Presswell, I find, to order their mourning. They want to go down to the funeral to see what Stapylford Park is made of; but I told my friend Mons. Sosthenes, that we should all see enough and to spare of it before we died; and that I should not be sorry if my *own* funeral were to prove the first introduction of my own *valétaille* to my family seat."

"And about this rascal of a cousin of Presswell's? — for as to the money, I take it for granted you will accept his offer!"

"Oh, the rascal is as much a matter of course as the loan. A rascal is essential to a lazy fellow like me. *I* shall want him to help me to get at my own money; and then *he* will want to help me to spend it. Besides, you know him already; and you will settle it all between you without boring me. Now do, Tich. — there's a good fellow — let fly a little note at the blackguard; and bid him come and teach me my lesson before I am called up to catechism. And now to supper — for I am devilishly hungry; — and pray let us have some Johannisberg for the Seltzer water. They gave me Markbrunner last night; and by Jove, I never slept a wink."

"You don't take exercise."

"Who *can* — in town? I often think I will go into the Life Guards, in order to be bumped and sworn into a passion in the riding-house. Fatigue is the best of opiates."

"Better come with me to Paris, and we will ride post together into Italy."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Tich.! Next spring, after Melton, we'll go abroad together, skim over France and Germany, winter in Greece; and the following year I'll come home, fight with my guardians, quarrel with my

mother — marry little Minnie Willingham — settle at Stapylford — and 'live cleanly as a gentleman ought.'"

This declaration, which was made in presence of the two waiters who were laying the cloth, caused a very significant smile to pass between them.

"I say, Bob," quoth Perkins, the senior waiter, as they descended the stairs together — for he was a wag, and like other men in office expected his delegate to laugh at his jokes — "I take it very few of them gemmen as Mr. Tichborne brings here and consorts with are in any thing of a condition to live cleanly and *like* gentlemen two years afterwards — eh? And don't you go to give the prime Hock to that 'ere young chap up stairs; for it's much if a young 'un such as he knows claret from Burgundy."

But to return to the fair tacticians in Seymour Street.

It was an agitating moment for the whole household when the cabriolet of Sir William Wyndham — a vehicle which would have made the illustrious Adams expire on the spot, either with laughter or disgust — drove up to the door. Lady Maria Willingham, albeit in general a very well-bred woman, and neither vociferous nor voluble in her communications with her servants, proceeded instantly to the head of the stairs, and strenuously and loudly assured her footman that she was at home — that the young ladies were at home — and that he might inform Sir William Wyndham *very* particular orders had been given for his admittance. Mademoiselle Céline, who, from the fact of Miss Eleanor's elaborate *coëffure* and *toilette*, had readily discerned that something was in the wind, was already eagerly peeping over the upper flight of stairs in order to catch a view of the lover; — at whose white corduroys and top-boots she presumed to make divers gestures of contempt; and Eleanor herself, who had settled with her mother that ample time should be given to Lady Maria and Sir William to settle the preliminaries previous to her own appearance, was quietly seated with Claudia in her dressing-room, abhorrently expressing her contempt of English country gentlemen in general, and of this same Sir William of Wyndham Park in particular. "Little does he imagine

at what a risk to his own happiness he makes me his wife!" was her concluding observation.

At length the fatal quarter of an hour had marked its last moment upon Claudia's repeater; — a lapse of time pre-accorded by the family consultation, for Lady Maria to receive the blushing confessions of the baronet, and furnish him in return with the maternal credentials which were to speed his wooing. Eleanor suggested that a liberal surplus of ten minutes should be allowed to their privy-council, in case the important contingencies of pin-money and jointure should be brought under debate. "Neither my mother nor lover possess a particle of delicacy," she observed to her sister; "I have no doubt they have already embarked into the chapter of finance. Nay, I should not be surprised to find Lady Maria specifying the provision to be made for younger children!"

"I do not like to hear you talk thus of a man you seriously intend to marry; whom you will swear, in the sight of Heaven, to love and honour!"

"And so I *shall* love and honour him. I have a mighty respect for fools, as forming the antipodes to my own knavery. As to Sir William, I shall do more than love— I shall positively *adore* him for furnishing a peaceful refuge to my sister and myself from an unhappy and discreditable home."

In this placable disposition did Eleanor descend to the drawing-room; and having paused a moment at the door, in order to ascertain by oral inquisition that no very imminent crisis was proceeding within, she quietly entered the room, extended her hand to Sir William Wyndham, and prepared herself to talk of the weather with an air of amiable unconsciousness. She perceived that her mother looked peevish and disconcerted; and suspected that her lover had been saying either too much or too little concerning the pecuniary eligibilities of the match. But Eleanor was rather excited than daunted by the prospect of a few difficulties to be smoothed over. — "With *me* he will be every thing that is liberal and conciliatory," thought she, "and when mamma leaves the room, which I see she is preparing to do, I shall put on my royal and benign

countenance of audience; and the treaty will be satisfactorily, if not speedily, adjusted."

Lady Maria was by no means one of those commonplace English mothers, who talk of "having left their handkerchief in another room," or of "having an important letter to answer by the post, which must form my excuse for leaving you so abruptly." She knew that Sir William Wyndham, of Wyndham Park, had found his way to Seymour Street expressly to make a proposal to her daughter, and she wisely judged that the sooner it was made the better. Acquiescing, therefore, in the desire she attributed to the reserved country gentleman, and somewhat clumsy suitor, that at least a ceiling and a floor should intervene between her own ears and his sentimental declaration, she left the drawing-room without peroration or apology; and proceeded to suspend poor Claudia's secret indulgences of tearful grief, by bestowing upon her all the tediousness of her parental hopes and fears for Eleanor's success, during the critical interval.

Eleanor Willingham, meanwhile, had seated herself on the sofa, and drawn forth — rather in compassion to her lover's embarrassment than to her own — the identical filmy web on which her needle had made so little progress during her Calmersfield visit, or since; but which served admirably to hang over with assiduous industry, in delicate emergencies, like the present instance. But notwithstanding her seeming pre-occupation, both eye and ear were sufficiently disengaged to apprize her that Sir William Wyndham had risen from his chair, and was advancing that useful piece of furniture angularly, from leg to leg, towards the sofa on which she had installed herself; and that his own musical boots were in active pursuit of the wooden quadruped. In another moment she heard nothing but the coarse wheeze of his hard breathing beside her workbox. He had taken up a pair of scissors, and was beginning to clip off minute sections of an *allumette* which he had unconsciously withdrawn from the ink-stand.

Eleanor now peeped slily over her embroidery, and observed that her future lord looked as auspiciously sheepish

as any victim destined to surrender its fleece at the Holkham spring meeting;—so mute, indeed, and so protracted were his deliberations, that she began to doubt whether she was not called upon to recommence her attack upon the weather. At length he hemmed his last hem, and began:—

"If I were not fully aware from general report, Miss Eleanor, of the amiableness of your disposition, I should hardly have presumed to wait upon you this morning with my present views and intentions."

Sir William paused—drew breath—took out a large yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, and honoured it with audible use, and elaborate refolding; and while Eleanor plied her delicate needle with redoubled, and almost angry activity, replaced it in his pocket. This measure having necessitated a partial rise from his chair, formed an excuse for a tedious resettlement of position; and on the strength of his preambular eloquence, Sir William already presumed to reseat himself three inches nearer towards the sofa.

"I conceive, Miss Eleanor, that your own discernment, as well as your mamma's experienced hints, must have acquainted you that a man of my easy condition in life naturally looks towards a suitable marriage as the only measure necessary to complete his happiness; and that having so settled his views, he does not relinquish them on a slight discouragement. For my own part, I do not hesitate to confess that my affections have long been engaged; and that in my earnest trust to form a permanent alliance with the Willingham family, I gratify at once my pride, the wishes of my friends, and my own tenderest attachment."

He made a tremendous abbreviation of the *allumette* at this euphonious close; and Eleanor felt that the respect with which he enveloped his compliments demanded the civility of a low bow in return. Gratified by the encouraging recognition, he bowed again. "Plague take the man!" thought the fair sempstress; "this noodle-and-doodle-scene of compliments will endure till midnight; and mamma's patience will never last out his prosing."

"The first time I ever set eyes on Miss Eleanor Willingham," resumed the baronet, "I saw something in her

countenance which encouraged me to form the most charming, the most exciting hopes of future happiness; and I still presume to trust that I shall not find myself disappointed."

Eleanor looked up from her work, and performed a sort of semi-serious, but very encouraging smile.

"Of my family, Miss Willingham, I flatter myself I need say little or nothing to the daughter of a brother baronet of my own county. The Wyndhams, of Wyndham Park, ma'am, have represented that county in nine various parliaments; and when I add that our patent dates from the restoration of the Stuarts, I trust I infer all that is necessary, both for our own loyalty and the respectable antiquity of the title. It is well known, however, that a Wyndham commanded an archery brigade at Agincourt; and that Sir Peter de Windhaume was lord of the buttery to Edward the First."

He paused — but *not* "for a reply." And the moderation of his wishes on this score was highly acceptable to Eleanor, who was now convulsed by suppressed laughter.

"With respect to fortune, Miss Eleanor, I need not, I fancy, be more explicit. Long as has been your residence on the Continent, your former familiarity with the environs of Heddeston Court can scarcely have left you unacquainted with the extent and importance of the Wyndham property. You remember Manning Wood, ma'am?"

Eleanor, in order to avoid a minute topographical sketch, bowed acquiescingly, although she knew about as much of it as of that of Birnam.

"Well, Miss Willingham — every acre of land, as the crow flies from Mannington Wood to Undercross Mill, was formerly included in Wyndham Chase; and even now, excepting the farms of Pear Tree Holme and Innertree, the former of which was taken into the Knatchbull family in the reign of William the Third, by a marriage between Sir Marmaduke Knatchbull and Bridget Wyndham, third daughter to the second Sir John — and the latter exchanged between Sir Claude Willingham and my grandfather, early in the latter reign, by way of sealing some electioneering compact — I believe I may say that there

grows not a stick of timber on that ground, ma'am, which is not lawfully my own; — always under respect to the statute of entail, and necessary impeachment of waste, included in the limitation of the original title-deeds."

Eleanor longed to tell him that in these

> Nice quiddits of the law,
> Good faith she was no wiser than a daw:

but, on second thoughts, she deferred his election to the honour of becoming her *butt*, until after the marriage ceremony.

"Besides the Kentish property, ma'am, I have a small but compact estate in Wiltshire, called Camberley Lodge, at present let on lease to a worthy family of the name of Smyth; — *very* respectable people, who spell their name in the respectable way, with a y — although I should have been better pleased if they had also a right to the final e, like the Irish Smythes; — *that*, you know, Miss Eleanor, would have stamped them at once of the aristocracy; and it is always pleasant to have one's tenants properly appreciated and visited in the county. However, their lease will be out in nine years; and any lady who honours me with her hand shall then have the option of retaining Camberley. It has its advantages, ma'am — it is not above thirteen miles from Bath."

All this was too much for Eleanor's gravity; and she was forced to drop her thimble, in order that Sir William Wyndham's attention might be diverted from herself by a search after this golden implement of defence, which she had taken care should roll towards an opposite corner of the room.

"As to my Northumberland estates," resumed Sir William, gravely bowing as he presented the recovered thimble to its half-suffocated owner, "I must own, to my shame, that I have never yet visited them. I know, however, that they are entered into my rent-roll at a valuation of seventeen hundred and twenty-three pounds and a fraction per annum; and that they are said, in the Reverend Mr. Dodderkin's history of the county, to have been presented by King Athelstan to one Gryce Windorm, or Windholme, in recompense of service done against the Picts."

"I am astonished," said Eleanor, "that your curiosity has never induced you to inspect so ancient a possession of your illustrious progenitors."

"I reserve the pleasure, ma'am, as part of a bridal excursion which I sometimes indulge myself with the happiness of contemplating—an excursion, Miss Willingham, of which I cannot but believe that the proximity depends entirely on yourself."

Eleanor thought so too; and was only puzzled by the doubt thus thrown on the subject.

"Sir Joseph Willingham, Miss Eleanor, is a very respectable man."

"*We* have every reason to respect my uncle, Sir William; and we consider him fortunate in your friendship."

"And Lady Willingham;—her birth and education considered, Lady Willingham is an excellent woman. One can hardly believe her to have been a Bodham, and bred in the marshes."

"Lady Willingham has been quite a mother to my young sister," said Eleanor; "and we esteem her accordingly."

"And Mr. Willingham is a young man of considerable promise. I look forward to the period when Charles Willingham will represent the county of Kent."

"We have not seen my cousin since he was grown up; but we hear of him from every one as a person of great abilities and excellent qualities."

There now remained but one member of the Heddeston Court family to place under discussion; and Eleanor, who was well aware how matters had formerly stood between Mary and Sir William Wyndham, felt rather nervous on perceiving that he had hunted himself into a *cul de sac;*—she was curious, however, to observe in what way a man so totally unskilled in diplomacy would burrow himself out of the scrape. But Sir William had no thoughts of any such nefarious modes of escape.

"And Mary—Mary Willingham!"—said he, in a nervous, plaintive tone.

Eleanor almost started.

"She has a great regard for *you,* Miss Eleanor;—a

very high opinion of your talents and judgment. It was from her representations that I first learned to estimate you as you deserve to be estimated."

Eleanor was not missish enough to quarrel with the mode, where the fact had proved so satisfactory to her feelings.

"My cousin is very kind and very partial," said she, graciously. "Excepting my own sister, I have no friend on whom I more thoroughly rely. I am willing to hope that in future life a considerable portion of our time may be passed together."

"Ah, Miss Eleanor! if I could but hope that it would pass at Wyndham Park."

This was a stupendous advance; but still the proposition was scarcely sufficiently interrogative.

"Have I any chance of interesting you in my favour?" — said he, in an agitated stammer.

"Our acquaintance, Sir William, has been, at present, of such brief duration; and matrimony is so decisive — so very decisive a step!"

"Lord! ma'am — my character is known in half an hour; — I am the most off-hand fellow in the universe — plain English, and no disguise; — what you see me once, you may see me for ever. Besides, I am pretty well known — something of a public character, and my light has never been hid under a bushel. My constituents — my neighbours — the members of the Wyndham hunt — and of half a dozen of the best clubs in town — any of them will tell you what I am."

"Believe me, Sir William, I have hitherto heard nothing respecting you that has not been perfectly satisfactory."

"That is very handsomely said, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart," said Sir William, somewhat affected, and with a varying complexion, which betrayed stronger emotions than Eleanor had hitherto given him credit for. He rose and went to the window, and came back after a minute's absence, with twinkling eyes but firmer resolution.

"Oh, Miss Eleanor — take pity upon a very unhappy man! What are the Kentish estates, or the Wiltshire or

Northumberland property — what avails an old baronetcy and a seat in parliament, when one has nothing but a solitary home to resort to? — Oh, Miss Eleanor! intercede for me with your cousin — exert your kind influence in my favour; for, by Jove! the day that Mary Willingham marries another man will seal my death-warrant."

Absolutely petrified with amazement, Eleanor was too much thrown off her guard to find one word in reply; and Sir William, totally engrossed by his own feelings, did not notice her discomfiture, but vehemently pursued his apostrophe.

"It is now fifteen years since I first knew Mary, Miss Eleanor. When you and your sister were still shut up in the nursery at Heddeston Court, I used to visit the rectory with my late father; and there was Mary Willingham — a gentle, patient, generous girl, always ready to bear with my schoolboy violence, and admit me to a share of her toys and pleasures. She grew up — and every body said she was not pretty, nor graceful, nor so accomplished, may be, as other young ladies; but Mary always seemed pretty to *me;* — her eyes were so meek, and her voice so gentle, and her thoughts so kind for every one else, and so little for herself, that I have never ceased to love and worship her. I do not mind speaking the truth, Miss Eleanor, even to another lady; — let me, therefore, confess to you that she has long known all this; — twice I have offered myself to her acceptance, and twice she has refused me."

"So I had already heard," said Eleanor, faintly; observing that some sort of answer was necessary; while her own thoughts were wholly occupied in framing one to meet the eager curiosity of Lady Maria.

"She says she has a great respect for me — a great regard; — but that she does not love me with the preference necessary to the happiness of a married life."

"That is so like one of Mary's sententious formalities!" burst involuntarily from the lips of Eleanor.

"In short, I can no longer hope that she will deign to listen to *me* on that subject."

Eleanor was furious with indignation, at the idea of her poor, spiritless, dowdy cousin Mary's *deigning* to listen to

the very man she had *herself* determined to marry on the very slightest proposal.

"But if *you*, Miss Eleanor — you whom she loves and honours — would kindly interest yourself in my favour; if you would only represent to her that I require no preference — that I demand no love at her hands but such as I may hereafter win by the devotion of my whole affection and whole existence to her happiness — perhaps, madam, you might succeed in obtaining some slight concession — some distant prospect of a determination to think more kindly of my views."

"Sir William!" replied Miss Willingham, with as imposing an air as she could manage to assume, and rising from her seat in decided token of dismissal, "you must be well aware that, at my age, I cannot undertake a task of so much family importance without consulting mamma. I promise, in the mean time, to think over all you have said; and I need not assure you that you will find the whole family predisposed in your favour. Whether or not we shall ever become cousins, I will hardly venture to predict," continued Eleanor, graciously extending her hand by way of adieu; "but I trust we shall always remain friends; and that your visits to Seymour Street, thus once commenced, they will be frequently renewed."

She rang the bell for his cabriolet with the easy dignity of an ambassadress; and poor Sir William, without at all comprehending his own position, or the alteration of Eleanor's manner towards him, found his creaking boots in the hall at least a quarter of an hour sooner than he had intended. Lady Maria, equally startled by this premature announcement of departure, hastened down into the drawing-room in dismay.

"Good heavens, Eleanor! what has taken the man away so soon? Surely you have not been so mad as to refuse him?"

"He gave me no opportunity for so magnanimous an instance of self-denial."

"Why, what has he been saying and doing for the last half-hour?"

"Fulfilling the best purposes of his yea-nay existence

—boring and prosing. You must be patient, mamma; 'a snail cannot be matched against Eclipse.' It was too much to insist on a proposal on the very first visit; but trust to me that every thing shall be finally arranged to your satisfaction."

Lady Maria was too much disappointed to bear even the *word* satisfaction with patience. She was, at the same time, too well aware of Eleanor's determination of character to irritate her by further parley; and was forced to content herself with a sulky fit in her own dressing-room, enlivened by the interlude of a domestic tornado, vented upon the innocent Mademoiselle Céline.

With Claudia, meanwhile, Eleanor scarcely dared to be more explicit, on the subject of Sir William Wyndham's intentions, than with her mother. She had rashly promised her so much, that she could not immediately undertake the task of undeceiving her expectations. She suffered more, indeed, in the prospect of making her sister unhappy, than in that of making Lady Maria angry; and she was compelled to trust, like all imprudent people, to *time* for the re-adjustment of her difficulties. It was from Lady Robert Lorton that she chiefly expected assistance;—the person of all others on whom she least relied for counsel, and on whom she most sparingly bestowed her own confidence.

CHAPTER VI.

Deceive no more thyself and me,
Deceive not better hearts than mine;
Ah! should'st thou, whither would'st thou flee
From agony and shame like thine?—
And if there be a wrath divine,
A pang beyond this fleeting breath,
E'en now all future hope resign,
Such thoughts are guilt, such guilt is death. BYRON.

"ARE you going to the *déjeûné* at Wimbledon to-morrow?" enquired Lady Barringhurst of Mrs. Grandison, as they met in the vestibule of Lady Robert Lorton's boudoir, at the close of a sultry July morning.

"Of course! — what would be the use of remaining in town, with no other society than the strawberry-women; and with nothing but water-carts moving in the dusty streets?"

"And Lady Robert?"

"I have been employing all my eloquence in vain. She sets off for Spa on Thursday; and says that it would disarrange her travelling apparatus to appear in full dress the last day. Do what you can to persuade her; for without *her* presence the whole thing will be a failure," cried Mrs. Grandison, flying down to the britschka which was waiting to convey her to Kensington Gardens and Lord Cosmo Somerset; while Lady Barringhurst proceeded with her usual listless placidity towards the fairy cell, wherein Lady Robert Lorton, after her recent adieus, had already re-instated herself at full length upon a silken sofa, with a French novel in her hands. She entered unannounced, and quietly seated herself beside her friend.

"I am quite overcome with despair," said Lucy with a languid smile. "Grandison tells me you will have nothing to say to the *déjeûné* to-morrow, dear love. Surely you cannot contemplate so base a desertion? We shall all be there; — these silly boys have planned the *fête* solely in honour of our little coterie — Lord Cosmo for the sake of Bessy Grandison's bright eyes; Tichborne for mine; and little Stapylford in honour of your tiny ladyship's attractions; — and it would really be an act of infamy to play truant, after making them expend a year's income on peaches and macédoines."

"I fear poor Tichborne's income would not feast a sparrow for half a day; and you really ought to blush, dearest Lucy, for encouraging him to do the impossible, in hopes of exciting attention on your part, such as you never intend to bestow!"

"How can you calculate the extent of my liberality?" said Lady Barringhurst, justifying the admonitions of her friend by a vivid blush. "Depend on it, Tichborne will never ruin himself for *my* sake, either with or without reward. My gentle coz is like the mistletoe, which miraculously retains an unchanging verdure, though springing

out of a black and ruined branch. As the song runs, '*Il sait tout, il fait tout, il voit tout, il est partout!*'—and all the while *has* nothing! I am persuaded that his own allowance does not find him in eau de Cologne or his valet in shoestrings; yet he has always ample funds at his command."

"Inasmuch as, like the mistletoe to which you so aptly compare him, he is a mere parasite plant; drawing his vital powers from the life of others. It is nothing less than odious to see Mr. Tichborne, and Lord Cosmo, and Henry Mulgrave, and the rest of the tribe, living as they do on this poor foolish Lord Stapylford;—who is borrowing money at fifty per cent. and disgracing himself by all sorts of excesses, before his father is cold in his grave."

"And exactly *as* his father did before him. My dearest love, I should say that you were growing a savage prude, did you not wield the cudgels so furiously in defence of your '*Narcisetto, Adoncino d'amor.*'"

"Not *mine*, believe me! It suits Tichborne and his gang to persuade their silly dupe that he is desperately in love with me; in order that he may project *déjeûnés* and water-parties for their own amusement, and for the furtherance of their own *liaisons*."

"Oh fie! you are quite censorious!—*Sur quelle herbe as tu marchée aujourd'hui?*"

"*Sur une pensée, chère Lucie.*"

"*Et quelle est elle?*"

"That we have been all wandering on the brink of a precipice, and that *you* are still wandering on the brink of the abyss."

"This horrible Spa journey of yours has given you a fit of blue devils, or a fit of misanthropy!—or have you been weeping at the Lock Chapel, or mysticising with Mrs. Fry?"

"Neither, I assure you."

"Or perhaps you are pining after the Lisborough strawberry-leaves!—I fear you cannot forgive the duke's marriage."

"I cannot, indeed!—for I like Lisborough too well to

wish to see him made unhappy and contemptible for life; —nor can I be satisfied with his measures, so long as I have Claudia Willingham's wasting figure and tremulous voice constantly before me."

"My dear creature, you have too exalted a sensibility. Every girl grows thin at the close of the season. Living from April till July on sighs and syllabubs, hope and sponge biscuits is a bad regimen to encourage *enbonpoint;* and young ladies who pass their time in improving their minds and morals by studying Madame Cottin — as you are doing now — and their beauty by waltzing five nights out of seven from midnight till daybreak — have very little chance of escaping the charge of a consumption, if it should please some flirting duke to marry in the interim. The world says that Claudia Willingham is dying of vexation at the loss of Calmersfield; and that *you* are accompanying her to Spa, at once to escape Lord Robert's growls for the forfeiture of his heirship presumptive, and acquit your own conscience of any active share in the fair Claudia's decease."

"The world speaks as usual, with a forked adder's tongue. — I am going to Spa simply because I am weary of my mill-wheel at home, and because I want the stimulus of novelty and travel to keep me awake. You and I, Lucy, and other giddy-pated fools, who have ruined their palates by over excitement ——"

"Now dearest! — let me pray you to remember that 'the dog-star rages!' Do not encroach too far on my patience with your predications, or I shall take pity on myself, and call the carriage."

> "By heavens! you stir not! —
> I must be heard — I must have leave to speak,"

exclaimed Lady Robert Lorton in a more cheerful tone, as she threw away her book, and clasped her arms round her friend.

"Are you mad this morning?" said the amazed Lady Barringhurst, wholly unprepared for this vehement histrionic exertion.

"Most methodically so, dear Lucy. I am going to

leave you for two or three months—to leave you, love, surrounded by mischiefs and moral evils."

"For my part, I can discern *no* method in your madness;—you leave me surrounded by my husband and children;—and if you are pleased to designate *them* as mischiefs and moral evils, I can only say that you are more frank than polite."

"And by what *other* human beings, dear Lucy, are you encompassed?"

"You put me to a vast trouble of consideration!—what other *human* beings?—By my kinsfolk and acquaintance—my men-servants and my maid-servants."

"You are trifling with me."

"It is the first time I ever saw *you* serious."

"I am discontented with myself, with you, and with many whom I tender less dearly."

"Madame de Staël says, in one of her beautiful explosions of eloquence, that a degree of solemnity attends every journey commencing with a sea-passage. From your air and gravity of speech this morning, I opine that Lord Robert has condemned you to invade the Netherlands by way of Ostend;—and that the prospect of twelve hours in a steam-packet has reduced you to this matter-of-fact condition of body and mind."

"We *do* sail for Ostend, for we have the Admiralty yacht; but believe me there is nothing in my projected excursion which does not promise me unmixed gratification. The Willinghams and the Villa Armagnanos are the pleasantest companions imaginable for such an expedition; and the set already assembled at Spa is excellent. But *you*, Lucy—you who are about to brave this dangerous crisis of the season, in London or at Wilmount—it is *you* who make me uneasy at quitting England. At this time of the year people have flirted themselves into a most perilous degree of familiarity;—their mode of life has settled itself into habits of daily and hourly meeting, and their 'whereabout' has become a matter of the most positive anticipation."

"So much the better!—it saves one an infinity of trouble and explanation to have those things properly under-

stood. In May, I always find myself bored to death with 'Shall you be at Lady Jane's to-morrow night?'—'At which door do you order your carriage?'—or 'At what o'clock do you generally ride?'—In July it is all an understood thing."

"And 'at what hour does Barringhurst go down to the House?'—when does *that arrangement* begin to be tacitly understood?" enquired Lady Robert very significantly.

"Alas! never!" replied Lucy, rather abashed. "For Barringhurst's movements, like your own whimsicalities, are not to be calculated upon. And so you are really afraid that we are all going to be too happy in this deserted town of London?—you fancy that, seeing a fine crop of grass springing in the streets, we shall emulate the dangerous Arcadian *naïvetés* of the '*Bella età di oro.*'"

"I only fear you will find that the practice of the season makes perfect in more arts than an apt collision of persons and places. The world, after talking 'an infinite deal of nothing' for three idle months, grows bold in the appropriation of names;—and Scandal, intoxicated with endless potations, seizes on surrounding objects with the unsteady hand of inebriety, and defiles by many a random touch."

"My dear child! you are positively as metaphorical as the Vicomte d'Arlincourt!"

"*Shall* I speak plainly?—Nay! I both must and will; for you already look too conscious not to increase my apprehensions. My dear Lucy! all London is talking of your intimacy with that scapegrace of a cousin of yours."

"With Tichborne?—of course!—He is on the happiest terms of friendship both with Barringhurst and all my family; and as I am neither very old nor very ugly, the malicious majority of people in society are enabled to invent a scandal, whereby they trust the comfort of our mutual position may be destroyed."

"Of *yours*—but not of his!—His position is secure in his own heartless egotism. Let whatever evil befall *you*, he will always find some other house to dine in, or opera-box to lounge in, or villa to raise his violets and strawberries; while *yourself*, if once wounded by——"

"You are really too ill-natured!" interrupted Lady Barringhurst, with a heightened complexion, and with something more nearly approaching towards an angry feeling than she had ever experienced in her life. "Why should you attribute feelings and follies to me, of which *you* hold *yourself* absolutely guiltless? You know that I am very happy in my home; — that I love Barringhurst and my children as much as I can be at the trouble of loving any human thing; — that I never voluntarily injured man or woman. And why should you suppose that for the sake of Tichborne — whom I like about as well as my bay mare, or my new harp, or my conservatory, or any other inanimate object which serves to increase my stock of amusements — why should you suppose that to swell the selfish vanity of a good-looking, ill-acting, mere man of pleasure, I would sacrifice my happiness, mortal and immortal — renounce my home and my children — and expose myself to the sneers of society, and the reprobation of Heaven? — My dear Lady Robert! you should learn to judge more charitably of your friends, whether as regards their understanding or their principles!"

"Now Lucy — *be* just — *be* candid with me in your turn! — Have I insinuated that you contemplate any such sacrifice? — Do you imagine that *any* woman calmly contemplates her own destruction, — or that the incautious swimmer, about to venture beyond his depth, exclaims, 'There runs the river which will destroy me! — and, lo! I dare my destiny?' No — no! — I do not even suppose that you are aware of regarding Mr. Tichborne with a dangerous preference; but you have accustomed yourself to his society and to his entire devotion; — his flatteries have become a necessary aliment; and were Lord Barringhurst to overhear and take umbrage at the whispers of society, and exact his exile from your house, I am satisfied that his absence would be a source of deep regret to your feelings, and perhaps of rebellion against your husband's authority."

"Certainly! — I should feel that Barringhurst was acting like a fool, and consider it my duty to nip his absurdity in the bud. I most assuredly would *not* resign my cousin

Tichborne's friendship at his instigation. Were I *guilty*, I could make no humbler sacrifice."

"Were you guilty, he would not ask it;—he would drive you from his house. But *being* innocent, he has surely a right to require that you should disarm suspicion by foregoing a very intimate connection with a man of very indifferent character."

"You will make me fall in love with poor Tichborne in right earnest, out of a spirit of contradiction," said Lady Barringhurst, sportively. "How I wish the world would trouble itself as little with my affairs as I interfere with those of others!"

"My dearest Lucy!—I interfere no further than to place you on your guard. I am going away for some months, and with a persuasion that I leave you in the hands of those who are interested to work you evil. I give you my faithful word that malicious eyes are upon you, and eager to misinterpret your proceedings; but, alas! it is not these which my affection for you induces me to dread."

"You seem to limit your apprehensions to the wickedness of my raging lion of a cousin."

"Still less—for against *him* you are already guarded. Every woman has an instinctive mistrust of her lover."

"Neither Scylla nor Charybdis?—Explain! explain!—for you are beginning to excite my curiosity. Where lies the sunken rock of my future perdition?"

"In Bessy Grandison's sophistry! There exists not half the danger in the machinations of twenty libertines, than is concealed within the pernicious maxims of one dissolute woman."

Lady Barringhurst reseated herself, and assumed a patient attitude, as if better inclined to listen to the remonstrances of her friend.

"I was myself formerly fascinated by Mrs. Grandison's wonderful powers of conversation;—I preferred her to almost all my intimate friends—even to you. There was a buoyant gaiety in her discourse—an originality in her turns of expression, mingled with a carelessness or defiance of received opinions, which rendered her a most welcome

resource against the monotonous routine of society. The excitement of her piquant vivacity soon became essential to my amusement;—I introduced her into my own circle, into yours—and for some time she was careful to retain, among us all, that decent reserve of manner by which she had originally tempered her gaiety, and won her way to my esteem. It was in Lisborough's favour that this was first forfeited. He—by nature the gravest and most listless of mortals—was intoxicated by the varying charm of her lively sallies—and Bessy, in her turn, exaggerated her own attractions by 'gilding refined gold,' and indulging in every possible indiscretion of speech. I saw all this—but I regarded it only as a breach of good breeding and good taste; for knowing that the Grandisons were *nouveaux riches*, and extremely ambitious of buying their road towards the fashionable world, I concluded her to be aware of the extent of Lisborough's estate in that ethereal territory—of the value of his single suffrage—and therefore anxious to ensure it at any risk. I was persuaded that when once she had established herself as one of the presiding deities of Lisborough House, she would resume her former lively, but not unfeminine *naïveté* of address."

"You did not perceive that the assumption had been in the first instance;—that you had been the dupe."

"So little, that while all the world was inveighing against her undisguised familiarity with Lisborough, *I* was constantly encouraging the business, and bringing them together; in order that she might become surfeited with ducal dignities, and subside once more into my friend Bessy Grandison. Soon, however, I discovered other instances of bad taste in her habits;—I saw that she was not naturally 'of us and of our company,'—that she was always restless in our little *réunions*, languishing after greater displays, and seeking after fresh conquests. This destroyed the harmony of our *far niente* association, and by degrees my preference of her society was moderated into indifference."

"A change which herself and others did you the honour of attributing to a jealousy of her ascendency over the duke."

"She never *had* any real ascendency over Lisborough. He was amused and attracted by her brilliancy of conversation, as he might have been by the efforts of any other charlatan; but he is, in truth, so innately and intensely aristocratic, that he always felt revolted by *parvenu* contact of any kind; yes!—even in the guise of a beautiful woman. But I own that her conduct respecting him *was* the first origin of my disgust;—such lengths as she went to secure his notice, and appear with him in public in his opera-box, or phaeton, or wherever the mighty foolhood of the world were gathered together! But this was not her worst offence, in my eyes."

"What more could she do—unless to interfere in some flirtation of her own?"

"No! she was pleased to move my indignation by a still more contemptible manœuvre. Like every other giddy married woman, Bessy over-rated her own powers; and ventured to put lance in rest against the attractions of younger and more innocent rivals; and——"

"You do not mean to assert," interrupted Lady Barringhurst, "that an unmarried girl—whatever her beauty—whatever her innocence—has any chance of victory in a struggle with an experienced matron who does not scruple to put forth all her powers of fascination, legitimate or lawless?"

"Indeed I do!—In the first blush of such a connection, the married woman would doubtless obtain the preference. Such a Circe is mistress of arts which, for a certain time, assume an unlimited influence over her lover's mind;—but it does not last, Lucy!—you know that it does not!—The very first advantage obtained by her younger and purer rival is decisive;—there is a repose—a holy quietude about the affections of an inexperienced girl, to which the man of pleasure flies for refreshment after the perils and exactions of a less hallowed attachment."

Lady Barringhurst sighed.

"And this Mrs. Grandison soon found to her cost. After opposing the Duke of Lisborough's inclination for Claudia Willingham in every possible way, and thwarting them on all occasions, she no sooner decided that he had

made up his mind to marry, and that Claudia was about to become mistress of Calmersfield, than she began paying her court in the most abject way to the whole family."

"That, I suppose, is the Willingham version of the affair."

"Far from it!—They were too much engrossed by their own plans and plots to take the least notice of hers. It was *I* alone who, blushing for her as my former friend, detected and despised her meanness."

"Poor Bessy! It would have been hard to give up her own particular duke at a moment's warning, after paying for him so dearly."

"Pray hear me out with patience!—In the midst of all her toadying and cringing—just when she was making love to the whole Willingham family, from Mrs. de Vesci's parrot to the future duchess, she caught a glimpse of Charlotte Grayfield's counter-mine, in time to turn her apostasy to account. Lady Anastasia, she knew, would be a dupe far better fitted to her purposes than the daughter of an artful woman of the world, such as Lady Maria Willingham; so instantly deserting to the enemy, she persuaded Lisborough that all London was laughing at him for being caught by a decided match-hunter; and that the Willinghams had followed him to England with a casting-net in their hands, ready prepared to throw over the finest gudgeon of the river Thames!"

"But can you believe that she said and did all this?"

"Without the least shadow of a doubt! Lisborough never approached me at that period without some ill-natured history respecting my friends, nor without candidly giving up his authority! and you are well aware that he is not sufficiently imaginative to invent either the one or the other. However, I will even grant her absolution for her sins in that adventure. It served to develope her true character; and I have since learned to estimate the full extent of its duplicity."

"You are alluding to her flirtation with Lord Cosmo?"

"I cannot think of it with patience!—Scarcely had she put the seal to her treachery towards the poor Willinghams, and turned the observation of her leisure upon our

little coterie, than she perceived the good understanding existing between Lord Cosmo Somerset and little Barbara Desmond!—for Barbara is the most *naïve*, frank, infantine creature in the world, and did not even attempt to conceal her preference. We all saw it; and even Lady Desmond herself, who could not regard a younger brother as a brilliant match for her daughter, was moved by Lady Barbara's confiding and visible attachment to overlook his deficiencies. I positively lose my patience when I think of it all;—for in *my* opinion Bessy Grandison's malevolent and gratuitous interference in this instance was scarcely less flagrant than Satan's incursion upon the innocent happiness of Paradise."

"I was at Brighton when the affair commenced; and having left Lord Cosmo in all the sublime and beautiful enthusiasm of a matrimonial attachment for Lady Barbara, I find him on my return a despairing lover at the feet of Mrs. Grandison.—But how is *she* accountable for his inconstancy?"

"By having courted him from his allegiance. Yes! absolutely courted him!—A boy of his age was enchanted to find a woman of her fashion and beauty sighing at his feet; and without one compunctious sigh, he left that fine, generous-hearted, noble-minded creature, Barbara, to break her heart or her neck, as circumstances might invite her."

"You have made out a strong—an iniquitous case against our friend; and with the evidence so grievously against her, I can scarcely conceive how you have since been able to endure her society with patience."

"Believe me I have borne it most *im*-patiently, both for the Willinghams' sakes, for little Desmond's, and for my own. But I have no more courage to irritate a truly mischievous woman than to attack some rabid beast of prey. I could not overmaster her, and must necessarily become her victim. Even Lady Desmond, with all her maternal indignation rife in her heart, bears and forbears with Mrs. Grandison; and I am fain to follow her example, in the certainty that were I to acknowledge my insight into her character, she would lay siege to Lord Robert, undermine all my happiness, nor rest so long as one stone remained upon another of my peaceful home."

"You make me shudder! — And now tell me, for the love of goodness, why you suspect her of being *my* enemy; and in what manner my undoing could tend to her advantage?"

"She has tact enough to have perceived that she has long been losing ground among us; yet is weak enough to estimate that ground at far more than its actual value. Lisborough has other objects to occupy his attention; — Lady Grayfield having gained her end, despises her tool; the Desmonds fly from her as from a basilisk — and even Wallace, and Wolryche, and Mulgrave, and Tichborne, while they adore her wit and beauty, and old Grandison's dinners, cannot disguise from her their consciousness of her treachery. Now although I believe her to have persuaded herself into a passion — a Grandison passion, be it understood — for Lord Cosmo, even he does not suffice to occupy her active mind, or to maintain her slippery footing in the world of fashion."

"Certainly not; — a *female* buoy is necessary among the billows of the *beau monde*."

"No sooner therefore did she find herself sinking, than she clung to me. And in what manner do you suppose she attempted to frame a cable for her new anchor?"

"I cannot guess."

"By branding me with her own infamy! She tried to allure me within the boundaries of the quarantine ground, in order that, being infected, I might share her penance and her company! She attempted to persuade me that Stapylford was dying for me: she had already deluded *him* into playing off the impertinent airs of a lover in my behalf; and by constantly making him the hero of her conversation, as an '*aimable polisson*' — a '*joli petit page*' — '*Cherubino,*' or some other absurd appellation, she fancied she would end by interesting me in favour of a boy of nineteen, 'with all his *blushing* honours thick upon him.'"

"He is certainly a very elegant young man ——"

"To captivate some elegant young lady, fresh from her sonatas and her French grammar. As to me, I am too idle to be at the trouble of loving any body but my husband; — and as to pretty pages, either in general or par-

ticular, I could see the whole race drowned in milk of roses without a pang. However, Bessy's attempt served to put me on my guard; and when I saw her playing a similar and a more dangerous game in *your* habitation, I learnt to detest *her*, and to tremble for you."

"Yet this is the very first warning you have hazarded!"

"Lucy — Lucy! even now — how ungraciously have you received my remonstrances."

"I was wrong to be so captious," said Lady Barringhurst, affectionately extending her hand towards her friend.

"Besides, I felt re-assured by the excellence of your own heart and principles — by your affection for Barringhurst and for your children."

"These might suffice to guard against guilt, but not against the imprudence which assumes its semblance."

"And therefore on the eve of my departure I have ventured to open your eyes. One of the principal objects of my expedition to Spa has been to avoid all the jealousies attending the Lisborough marriage; but I have it still more at heart to break off my connection with Mrs. Grandison, and without the scandal of a rupture. Beware, dear Lucy, how you place yourself too deeply in her power to become free again by a similar effort."

Lady Barringhurst re-assumed her attitude of uneasy meditation.

"Now own the truth!" continued Lady Robert, her cheeks flushed with friendly eagerness, "has she not already done her utmost to urge your defiance of the opinion of the world?"

Lady Barringhurst smiled.

"Has she not laboured on all occasions to place you under the observation of the public in Tichborne's society? Has she not frequently left you to a *tête-à-tête*, in your drives, and rides, and walks, without any voluntary acquiescence on your part?"

"She has, indeed! — you are perfectly familiar with her manœuvres, which I had hitherto believed accidental as my own actions."

"Experience of her plans towards myself has made me

a mighty tactitian in such affairs. One thing more; has she not contrived that Tichborne should accompany you to-morrow to the breakfast?"

"I believe we were to have been a *partie quarrée* in her barouche. Tichborne and I, herself and Lord Cosmo."

"And Lord Barringhurst, no doubt, was to ride down, at her instigation, with Sir Comyne Wallace, or Wolryche; — so that you could not possibly have made your entrance to the *fête* upon his arm?"

"Precisely! — and how, even warned as I am, can I evade this peril? — By your own account it is dangerous to provoke her malice. Dearest Lady Robert! — sacrifice your inclinations in my favour; — come down with me to Wimbledon; and as your horses have already left town, I shall have an excellent excuse for using my own carriage on your account."

"I will oblige you with pleasure, even at the risk of appearing as capricious and fantastic as an ape in the eyes of the whole world — or at least of that minute fraction of it which is at present remaining in London. But I must exact one condition in return."

"Name it — and command my compliance."

"That you do not make yourself conspicuous at the breakfast with Tichborne as your knight; — and that you do not invite him to stay with you at Wilmount during my absence from England."

Lady Barringhurst paused for a moment.

"I scarcely dare engage myself by a promise in either instance; for with the best inclinations——"

"My dear Lucy — you are well aware it is by the spirit rather than by the letter of the vow, that I wish to fetter your actions."

"Well then — trust to me in all honour; and at three o'clock to-morrow I will call for you to accompany me to Wimbledon. Satisfy yourself that I will henceforth avoid Tichborne's *exclusive* society as much as circumstances will admit."

CHAPTER VII.

But *laissez aller!* — Knights and dames I sing,
Such as the times may furnish. 'T is a flight,
Which seems at first to need no lofty wing,
Plum'd by Longinus or the Stagyrite:
The difficulty lies in colouring,
(Keeping the due proportions still in sight)
With nature, manners that are artificial,
And rendering *general*, that which is especial.

The difference is, that in the days of old
Men made the manners — manners now make men;
Primed like a flock, and fleeced too in their fold,
At least nine, and a ninth beside of ten.
Now this at all events must render cold
Your writers, who must either draw again
Days better drawn before, or else assume
The present with their common-place costume. BYRON.

THE following day was more than propitious. No one could have believed, in observing the filmy clouds which attempered the sunshine — and the balmy air which shook the fragrance from the blossomed shrubs — that a *fête champêtre* was in agitation. As the Ducca de Villa Armagnano observed, "*Le tems étoit à commande; — ni pluie, ni soleil — ni vent — ne ménaçoit les ailes argentées du bonheur!*"

Now the little billet in which Lady Barringhurst announced to her dangerous friend her change of plans for the morning had arrived too late and too unexpectedly to be counterplotted by Mrs. Grandison's manœuvres; but the consequences of the altered plan were far from being so auspicious to the enjoyment of the parties concerned as was the temperament of the atmosphere. Lord Cosmo, "for the sake of appearances," was compelled to vacate his seat in the barouche, and drive down Mr. Tichborne in his cabriolet; and Mrs. Grandison, thus miserably defrauded of her due, and having, moreover, contrived to manœuvre her own husband into another party, had only to choose between the air of desertion occasioned by a solitary drive, and the society of any accidental female bore, in need of a conveyance to Wimbledon.

She had serious thoughts of overlooking the coolness subsisting between herself and the Willinghams; although

they had overtly marked their sense of her evil-dealing towards them by omitting her from their list of invitations to General de Vesci's ball; a *fête* which — thanks to their own fashionable currency, and the metallic currency of the ex-governor's rupees — had proved one of the most brilliant of the season. The tribe of Westland had been overpowered by the ranks of the peerage, commanded by Lady Maria; and the results of the splendid evening had procured to Eleanor (aided by her own skilful management) the *reputation* of having refused Sir William Wyndham, and to Claudia the *bonâ fide* honours of a proposal from the younger son of an Irish earl; an offer which, after having carefully ascertained that his elder brother was a young man of the rudest habits of plebeian health, Lady Maria had thought proper to reject.

At the very moment, however, that Mrs. Grandison finally renounced her hope of coaxing the Willinghams back into good humour, one of Lady Maria's own choicest specimens of caligraphic humbuggery was placed in her hands; earnestly entreating her to procure an invitation to the breakfast for her youngest daughter, Minnie; who was passing a few days at home, previous to the departure of her family for the Continent. Being fully aware of Mrs. Grandison's influence with Lord Cosmo Somerset, one of the originators of the *fête*, she preferred applying to *her*, rather than provoking the comments of Lady Robert Lorton; who had resolutely declared her intention of absenting herself from the Wimbledon breakfast. Nothing could have been better timed than such an application; and all was immediately settled. Eleanor accepted a seat in the barouche; and little Minnie, sanctioned by Mrs. Grandison's invitation, replaced her sister in the De Vescis' carriage.

It was the first time that the volatile Eleanor had felt really at her ease since she had so harshly terminated the hopes of Frederick Lorimer. Her conduct on that occasion had proved a signal of misfortune to the family; being followed by the announcement of the Duke of Lisborough's engagement to Lady Anastasia; and by her own mortifying misconception respecting the views entertained by Sir William Wyndham; — while her personal disappointments had

been aggravated by the sight of Claudia's failing health, in disguise of which they had rashly pursued their accustomed round of dissipation. To cheat the fashionable world of its meed of mockery, they had danced with aching hearts at many a ball, and twined the garland of pleasure around brows throbbing with the consciousness of degradation. Eleanor's disappointment, indeed, had its bright side; she had escaped an eternal union with a man whom she despised; and she always assured herself that Sir William Wyndham's prosiness, and his creaking boots, formed a consolatory *per contra* to his rent-roll and family diamonds. — But, alas! it was not thus with Claudia!

From the moment that the news of his grace of Lisborough's engagement was first circulated by Lady Grayfield's officious zeal, nothing else had been talked of or thought of throughout the various circles of London. Every one had some common-place phrase to repeat on the subject; for it was considered a highly respectable topic of discourse. Many affected "never to have thought the duke a marrying man," who had never thought twice about him in the course of their lives; and others had "always predicted that his grace's flirtation with Claudia Willingham would end in nothing," who, till her name had been circulated upon the same breath of rumour that wafted the news of Lady Anastasia's promotion, had never chanced to hear it pronounced. It was in vain that Eleanor devised plans of amusement in order to distract her sister's attention from this all-engrossing alliance. At Almack's, some partner inexperienced in the gossip of the day, some "scarlet runner" of a cornet in the Life Guards, or raw dandy from Oxford, was sure to refresh the wound by a detail of the expected splendours of the Duchess of Lisborough; and whenever, in the course of her dowager airings with Mrs. de Vesci or old Lady Monteagle, she entered a shop, the first object presented for approbation was sure to claim the sanction of Lady Anastasia Burgoyne's name; — every new bracelet, and new carriage invented in London, was said to have been selected by the Duke of Lisborough for his bride! Poor Claudia was destined to hear but of him and of his tenderness; and as,

according to the severe canons of modern fashion, the loving couple themselves were carefully secluded by their friends from public view, the farce was admirably kept up on all sides.

To Claudia, however, that farce was of very tragical endurance; and the more so from the constant effort to command her own feelings, by which she was partly enabled to deceive her mother. She was persuaded that nothing would afford so satisfactory a vent to Lady Maria's irritated feelings as to have a reasonable excuse for recounting to all her own immediate set the sufferings of her daughter — the martyrdom to which she had been wantonly consigned by the Duke of Lisborough's unwarrantable fickleness! But of this legitimate subject of complaint her ladyship was defrauded by Claudia's singular fortitude, and Eleanor's presence of mind. Not even those who approached them most familiarly had the least right to accuse them of having experienced one moment's disappointment. But Eleanor was not only growing weary of her tedious "part of excellent dissembling," but extremely uneasy on account of her sister's sleepless nights and failing appetite. She had little hope of alluring her mother to Spa; where the mineral springs had formerly proved of powerful efficacy in fortifying Claudia's delicate constitution; until General de Vesci's opportune generosity had so unexpectedly enabled her to place in the hands of Lady Maria the sum necessary to defray the expenses of the excursion. Instead of wasting the five hundred pound note on superfluous finery, it was appropriated to a continental tour; and Eleanor soon found little difficulty in persuading the whimsical Lady Robert to associate herself with their party for the summer. Minnie was to remain in England, under the care of the Heddeston family; and although the plan was somewhat hastily arranged, it was perfect in all its branches, and had restored the whole party to good humour, through the all-powerful excitement of the "pleasures of hope." The Willinghams did not think it necessary to inform Lady Robert that they were flying from the vexatious sight of the Duke of Lisborough's marriage; nor did *she* feel herself compelled to

acquaint them that their own object in the journey was to break off her intimate connection with Mrs. Grandison and her gang. In the mean time all London regarded them as a very happy little knot of friends; rich enough, and idle enough, to convey their summer *ennuis* as far as the Prussian frontier of the Netherlands.

But although both the Willinghams and Lady Robert were, or persuaded themselves that they were, "aweary of the world"—(that world which is comprised within the three westerly parishes of the British metropolis)—they all secretly and severally, though unconfessedly, regretted that the date of the day fixed for their departure to Dover would deprive them of the pleasure of assisting at the most brilliant and original *fête* of the season;—the breakfast to be given at Wimbledon in honour of the rival beauties of London. Lord Cosmo Somerset, Mr. Tichborne, and Sir George Wolryche, had persuaded Lord Stapylford to hire the beautiful villa of Ebury Hill, within six weeks of his father's decease, in order to afford them a locale for this chivalrous undertaking; and it was shrewdly suspected that with Presswell's assistance he had contributed at least his own and Tichborne's share of the funds which they all four affected to subscribe in defrayment of the expenses. Nothing indeed could exceed the clamour of expectation excited by the lavish preparations for the *fête;* and the four ladies who were suspected as the veiled goddesses of its worship were pointed out by many an envious tongue in the persons of Ladies Robert Lorton, Barringhurst, and Desmond, and Mrs. Grandison. Sir George Wolryche, indeed, was known to adorn nothing but himself, and was generally accused of insinuating himself into this gallant project for the pleasure of concocting the bill of fare, and assuming a temporary importance which ensured him listeners and laughers for his threadbare jests during the remainder of the season.

Lady Robert, who was fully conscious that the idle and inconsistent Lord Stapylford had been deluded by his intriguing companions into the affectation of a sentimental passion for herself, had at first been seized with a severe fit of prudish virtue, determining her to absent herself

from Ebury ;—but she was by no means sorry that Lady Barringhurst's position afforded her an excuse for departing from her resolution ; while Lady Maria, who, by way of courting her ladyship, had expressed the most vehement readiness to leave town on the very day of the breakfast, found a highly diverting apology for her own infirmity of purpose, in a sudden accession of maternal sensibility towards Minnie. "She should not see her poor dear girl again for many months ; and she was eager to show her a glimpse of the world, and afford her a little amusement previous to her departure. Lady Willingham thought a girl of fourteen too young to be introduced to such a scene ; but then Lady Willingham was notoriously rigid on such points ; and even chose to absent herself and her daughter from the breakfast in compliment to old Lady Monteagle. Now Lady Maria could not see what right her old friend and neighbour had to interfere with Lord Stapylford's amusements ; if the young lord thought proper to entertain himself and the world too early in his mourning, his grandmother and her country neighbours had better close their eyes upon so boyish an offence. In short, *for Minnie's sake*, both she and her daughters had resolved to defer their journey for another day, and appear at the Ebury *fête !*" —People often think their logic irrefragable, because nobody cares to confute it. They terminate some uninteresting egotistical harangue, with convincing self-applause, without perceiving that the bowing audience have bestowed nothing beyond the "*porches* of their ears" upon its subtleties. It is, in fact, an impertinence to intrude the arguments which influence our private affairs upon the patience of indifferent persons ; for the world is but slightly altered since the days of the Vicar of Wakefield ; it troubles itself to say and think very little of our paradoxes.—But to return to Ebury !

Much has been said by tourists, and sung by poets, of the beauties of Tempe ;—much of Vallombrosa —of Vaucluse —of the Rheingau. The skies of Italy, the seas of Greece, the summer sweetness of many a tropical climate, have been hymned by the sentimental of our land ; and if the writers and talkers of England are to be credited, our *own* earth

and our *own* air are alone incapable of charming the senses, and forming a landscape worthy the celebration of the painter and the poet. To such unworthy slanderers I venture to throw down a gauntlet of provocation; challenging them to show one earthly spot more beautiful than an English park, in all its vernal pride of woods and waters and verdure; a retreat more exquisite than a first-rate English flower-garden; or a crisis of atmospheric enjoyment more faultless than the "grey day" of an English summer.

The level lawns of Ebury, varied by the tufted thickets of surrounding slopes, and shelving towards a glassy lake, were glowing with an infinite variety of honied blossoms, and perfumed by the fragrance of unnumbered roses; when the wind-instruments, whose musicians were concealed by the sweeping branches of the feathered lime-trees, breathed forth their first voluptuous symphony in honour of the arrival of Lady Barringhurst and Lady Robert Lorton. The fair guests were required to pass through the flowery labyrinth of an immense conservatory, at the further door of which their gallant hosts were stationed to pay the usual compliments of welcome; and beyond, a group of village girls in the costumes of the different cantons of Switzerland, threw bouquets of flowers at the feet of the more favoured beauties as they passed. The first sound which greeted the ears of Lady Robert Lorton as she entered the trelliced conservatory, whose pendant blossoms were trained into a sort of flowery dome above, was the giggle of the Lorimer girls; who were attended, as usual, by a simultaneous troop of the most gregarious detachment of the household brigade; and who were venting their delight and amazement in fugues and canons of unmeaning vocatives. "Charming!—delightful!—enchanting!—delicious!—superb!—exquisite!" The next was a murmuring whisper of reproach, breathed in the ears of her lovely companion by Mr. Tichborne. "You promised us to be here early, Lucy—you promised me that I should accompany you:—is this keeping your word?"—And although she very honourably turned away her head, at the risk of demolishing one of Herbant's most imaginative hats among

the branches of a Dhatura sheeted with silver blossoms, she could not but overhear that Lady Barringhurst's vindication of herself rested upon an accusation beginning with the name of "Lady Robert Lorton." After this she was not surprised at the lowering brow which Mr. Tichborne presumed to turn upon herself!

From the remonstrances of her own admirer, meanwhile, she knew herself to be secure. Lord Stapylford not only had "never told his love," but was far from having outlived the age of blushing at its presumption. He received her at the external door of the conservatory with a stammer of confused apologies for the earnestness with which he had ventured to press his invitation on her acceptance; and when she turned away to speak to Eleanor Willingham, whose arrival on Mrs. Grandison's arm had immediately preceded her own, the boy-lover remained planted at his original post, with a look of the most respectful despair. He presumed not to force his attentions where they appeared so ill appreciated.

It is scarcely possible to conceive how any person really acquainted with the frame of London society can be guilty of the magnanimous self-sacrifice of attempting to contribute towards its entertainment. To purchase admission for a tribe of daughters to the future festivities of the season, or to bribe the great world to admit within its sanctuary some splendid nonentity from Oriental India, or Oriental London, may offer an excuse for the amiable weakness of a determined giver of balls. But to attempt he acquirement of a reputation of this description—to toil for the fame of adding originality to hospitality—to seek the ruinous honours of having given "the best thing of the season"—is indeed labour lost, and money squandered! Although, for a previous fortnight, nothing perhaps has been talked of but the invitations bestowed, and asked for, and declined—although some vacant seat in parliament has been less eagerly an object of ambition than a ticket for the coming ball or breakfast—although the most elaborate preparations have ensured a graceful perfection of toilet on the part of the guests, and a promising prospectus of the pleasures of the day—or night

—yet when the appointed moment really arrives, a general affectation of listlessness pervades the scene, and ingratitude is a-tiptoe to anticipate a general failure.

"I should not have come," drawled Captain Macneill to Gertrude Lorimer, trusting to Providence that she was ignorant of all the manœuvres, and visits paid, and notes written, and lies invented, by which he had tardidly secured an invitation, "only Stapylford bored me so on the subject. He is a very good little fellow, and one does not like to disappoint him; but at the close of the season, one is positively worn out by these dancing breakfasts."

"Oh, as to that," observed Sir George Meredyth, one of his brother officers, "I should have liked the thing well enough—as I told Wolryche last night at the Opera—only the distance is such a cursed venture to encounter, for the possible chance of a tolerable breakfast. As I rode through Piccadilly I bespoke a hackney coach, in case of rain, to come down and fetch away my pony; and I shall make Stapylford let me have half his poodle's camp-bed for myself. Do you know, Miss Lorimer, that Gillow has fitted up Stapylford's kennel with mahogany stalls and hair mattresses?"

"How very absurd you are!—I always quote *you*, Sir George, as the inventor of every improbable report current in London," replied Gertrude, enchanted by his fastidiousness; "I could wish, however, that among Gillow's contributions to the luxuries of Ebury, he had thought of providing a few benches or camp-stools; for in five minutes more I shall expire of fatigue. We have positively been wandering about among the American shrubberies this quarter of an hour."

"Oh! do not dream of so plebeian a luxury as repose, on such an occasion as this," observed Lord Atherley, another of the little military group. "We are to be torn to pieces between the attractions of a Tyrolian fair—a sham fight on the lake—a ballet—a tragedy displayed in fireworks—and a high-life comedy represented by cascades and *jets d'eau!*"

"A sham fight on the lake!" murmured Emily Lorimer, putting up her glass to gaze upon a beautiful sheet of

water, whose glassy surface offered a delicious reflection of the surrounding groves; "do they call that pond a lake? — Forbid it Leman and Como and Ullswater?"

"A lake — *à la mode de* George Robins. It is said that Stapylford *did* enter into a contract with Delcroix to fill it with lavender water; but Lord Cosmo and he could not agree whether it was to be '*aux millefleurs*' or '*ambrée*,' and so the project fell to the ground; and they were obliged to content themselves with clearing it of all the common-place carp and tench, and filling it, instead, with gold and silver fish, hired of Phillips for the day."

"You are quite scandalous!" persisted Miss Lorimer with a laugh of applause, and again putting up her glass. "But after all, I see nothing of this wonderful fleet."

"The Spanish fleet you cannot see, for it is not in sight?" replied Sir George with a sneer, "except unto such as are blest with microscopic eyes. Stapylford hired sixteen Dorking waggons to convey the materials for his naumachia to Ebury; for *my* part, I should have been happy to undertake its transportation with three wheelbarrows and a baker's truck. Robinson Crusoe's long boat would have proved a craft tremendous as that of Blackbeard the pirate to such a fleet!"

"And the Tyrolian fair?"

"Oh! that little elegant device of gallantry is stationed at the further end of the park, among the ant-hills and mole-hills; which Wolryche thought assumed an air of the picturesque savouring of the landscapes of the Tyrol. There is one *very* large one, the residence of the consular-mole of the little republic, which he declares is a fac-simile of the outline of the Brenner mountain."

"And the ballet? is it to be one of the insipid nothings to which we have been familiarised this season at the King's Theatre?"

"Oh fie! — can you imagine that we are to be presented with any thing less than original at Ebury? — I understand it is one of the tales from Lalla Rookh, dramatised and pirouettised by Coulon."

"Certainly," added Captain Macneill. "The ballet is called 'Paradise and the Peri.' Little Pauline is to

enact the wandering angel, and flies about tear-gathering, with one of Howell and James's chrysoprase *flacons* in her hand."

"Delightful!—enchanting!" exclaimed both the Lorimer girls; while the heroes of the cuirass, equally satisfied to have contributed to their mystification, regarded each other with a complacent smile, anticipative of the anti-Lorimer review of the case which was destined to enliven the morrow's mess-dinner.

Eleanor Willingham, meanwhile, had by no means bargained for the position in which she found herself, as *double* to Mrs. Grandison. She had fully expected to join Lady Maria and her sisters immediately upon her arrival at Ebury; and although she had no definitive conquest in view, no eldest son or gouty baronet to attract or retain in her chains, yet since the departure of Frederick Lorimer, and the defection of Sir William, she had degenerated into something of a general flirt;—repeated failures had rendered her desperate, and she was almost as well inclined to waltz with Captain Macneill, or Sir Comyne Wallace, or decide upon the auguries of "love-destiny" with the blossom of an aster and Lord Atherley's assistance, as either Gertrude or Emily, or any other thoughtless girl in London. Instead of these diversions, however, or diversions such as these, she found herself reluctantly compelled to accept Lord Cosmo Somerset's vacant arm; which by many an unconscious and sympathetic pressure betrayed to her in what manner its fellow contributed to the support of Mrs. Grandison, who occupied the left flank. Her ready tact convinced her that her presence was only sought and endured as a *blind* by the rest of the party; and as the trio wandered together among the embowered walks of the blossomy shrubbery, or stood romanticising on the borders of the lake, she had some difficulty to avoid overhearing the whispers of her companions—which were of far too pointed a character to be calculated for the amusement or forbearance of a third person.

Grievously mortified—bored to extinction—and not a little irritated to find herself occupying so equivocal a situation, Eleanor Willingham had too vast a share of the crafty

self-possession animating fashionable young ladies of the present day to allow any expression of the real state of her feelings to expand upon her countenance. She was well aware that of all moods ill humour is the least becoming to the features, and the least capable of exciting sympathy; and she was careful not to assume the fretful air of a conscious dupe. Nay, so practised was the fair Eleanor in the art of beguiling the time by looking *like* the time, that on the present occasion the smiles which accompanied her brow to every greeting friend appeared as spontaneous as can well be imagined. She seemed to be both voluntarily and contentedly a party concerned, in the generally-recognised flirtation between the giddy Mrs. Grandison and Lord Cosmo Somerset!

"What a grievous thing to see a pretty and talented young creature like that so thoroughly familiarised to the corruptions of society!" observed Lord Grandville to Lady Rachel Verney, after an encounter with the mysterious trio among the shadowy glades of a "cedarn covert." "You and I, my dear Lady Rachel, who have some fifteen years' experience of the wicked ways of this wicked world, could not assume a look of more artless unconsciousness, than that with which Eleanor Willingham lends the sanction of her innocent presence to *la* Grandison's evil-doings. I confess I have no predilection myself for young ladies in the *mouton qui rêve* style; but then I boldly profess myself of the *roué* school, and am not a marrying man. Now Lady Maria, who is professedly on the matrimonial tack for her daughters, ought to see and know that she is irremediably blighting their prospects, by allowing them to see and be seen among the connections of the vicious and ——"

"Hush! hush!"—exclaimed Lady Rachel Verney. "Alcibiades turned Timon?—this will never do!—You, my dear Lord Grandville, who have not the smallest pretension to play Sir Oracle on points of morality, may fairly allow my friend Lady Maria to regulate her own and her daughters' consciences according to her own good liking. Universal toleration is one of our national boasts."

"And pretty widely has it been extended, and pretty loudly vaunted by the latitudinarians of society! Well! Heaven mend us!—When I observe libertinism, like some obscene reptile crawling over the leaves of our roses and

lilies — when I see women — young and nominally innocent women — polluted by the filthy slime of its track — I grow ashamed of my calling, and could sometimes wish I had never 'heard the chimes at midnight.'"

"How long have you affected this maudlin sensibility?"

"Ever since I have observed the fairer and softer sex assuming the brazen front of impudence. I can laugh at sin in Tichborne; and overlook it in the piquant little Grandison; but a lovely girl in parading the cloven foot tempts me to visit the exhibition with all the castigation prescribed by Othello; — not upon herself, but upon her parents. There will come a time, either through death or sorrow, when Lady Maria will mourn in sackcloth and ashes over the lessons of worldly wisdom she has bestowed upon her daughters."

This colloquy, as well as the speaking sneer of many an observant eye, was of course inaudible to its unsuspecting object. Eleanor Willingham pursued her discontented way amid the varied pleasures of the *fête*, with a brow radiant with smiles; and many among her host of admirers, who would have been delighted to ensure her as their companion, forbore to intrude upon a party apparently so well arranged, and so well pleased with each other.

Meanwhile there was one of the condemnatory host whose air of mistrustful displeasure was visible even to herself. It was a young man of striking if not elegant appearance, who was an utter stranger to her; although his distinguished air, as well as his evident intimacy with Lord Stapylford and many of the most refined loungers of Ebury, plainly declared him to be a member, however obscure, of the world of fashion. Without being at all handsome, this man of mystery was gifted with a glance of intellectual intelligence distinguishing him from the common herd of *ennuyés* and fine gentlemen by which he was surrounded; and although Eleanor could think of no better definition whereby to paint him in her enquiries, than "a tall and very fair young man, extremely taciturn and solitary," she longed so describe him as "a very interesting looking personage who, for some reason which I cannot imagine, continually fixes an indignant and contemptuous observation upon all my movements."

Her curiosity, however, remained ungratified;

Name and station none could tell!

and she was beginning to despair of acquainting herself with the real character of her provoking and unknown satirist, when she suddenly caught a glimpse of his figure in the distance, leading her sister Minnie towards the dancers. She was now more startled and perplexed than ever. Minnie, who was one of the prettiest little fairies in the world, and bright with an early flush of youth such as seldom survives the vigils and heartburnings of even a single season, had from her first entrance at Ebury excited far more sensation in the fashionable crowd than had been anticipated by her mother and sisters, and seemed destined to revive the fairy triumphs of the Cenerentola. Lord Stapylford, too, who had been the playmate and friend of her childhood, welcomed her unexpected appearance among his guests with the warmest delight, seeming to forget his feigned or fancied attachment to Lady Robert Lorton in the girlish and unstudied graces of her juvenile rival; and Eleanor having observed her mysterious censor to be the intimate friend of the young lord of Ebury, naturally concluded that he was indebted for his acquaintance with Minnie to Stapylford's presentation. But when she saw her little trembling timid sister hang contentedly upon the stranger's arm, and smile up in his face with a glance of good understanding and affectionate regard, she avowed herself to be considerably puzzled! It was in vain, however, to question Lord Cosmo Somerset; his understanding was engrossed "full fathom five," by love and metaphysical casuistry with Mrs. Grandison. Having once pronounced that the great unknown was "some unmuzzled bear—some college-friend of Stapylford's"—he thought it extremely impertinent on Miss Willingham's part to intrude her curiosity on his further patience. "*Who* would bore himself with answering idle questions in the dog-days?"

Unfortunately the Platonic argumentations in which her two companions were engaged rendered them not only captious under the investigations of her feminine curiosity, but extremely insensible to that common-place prompting of our physical nature vulgarly denominated hunger. They

wandered on among the most unfrequented groves and sylvan thickets of the park; until they lost sight of the *fête*, and sound of the dinner or breakfast gong; so that when the company were finally seated at the different tables, whether in hall—saloon—tent—or marquee—that at which Lord Cosmo had been appointed to preside was found to be unhonoured by its hospitable host; thereby exciting a thousand surmises and innuendoes as to the probable cause of his absence. A substitute, meantime, was loudly and universally called for; when some wicked wit, or particularly good-natured friend, opportunely suggested that Mr. Grandison should occupy the vacant chair of presidency. Poor little, stupid, pompous Mr. Grandison, indeed, desired no better than to become of temporary importance; and judiciously prefaced every proposal for a glass of Champagne, or a juxta-position of *poulets* and *patés*, with, "In the absence of *my friend* Lord Cosmo, allow me to suggest!"

Weary, and hungry, and heartsick, and peevish—Eleanor at length persuaded her companions to draw towards the villa; where, on arriving, they had of course the pleasure to hear and see, "The tables full!" Of course, too, it required but a trifling exertion of authority on Lord Cosmo's part to have a fresh one immediately spread for themselves in an adjoining tent; which became quickly thronged by those importunate idlers, who had been either too late or too disagreeable to secure a ready admittance among the earlier detachments. Eleanor had therefore the supreme satisfaction of eating her "*croquettes de lapereau*," and "*tourte pralinée*," among the *élite* of the bores. Their forlorn hope of a repast became literally a refuge for the destitute!

Nor was this the sole inconvenience resulting to her from Lord Cosmo Somerset's erratic courses, and Mrs. Grandison's truant disposition. It was not to be supposed that their tardy progress would influence that of the programme of the *fête;* and the remainder of the guests having dined previous to their dilatory homeward march, naturally looked for some immediate entertainment to follow their own gastronomic feats. While Eleanor, there-

fore, was busy with her *glace panachée* and *pains de patience*, she had the satisfaction of seeing the whole party parade gaily before the entrance of the tent; some towards the lake — some towards the Tyrolian fair; but all bent upon pleasurable indulgence and joyous festivity. Yet in spite of these continued sounds of mirth and diversion, Lord Cosmo and his fair friend continued to whisper over their maraschino, and break mottoed bonbons for each other's gratification, with as much exclusive self-engrossment as if they only had inhabited the marquee — or the universe; nothing caring for the weariness of their involuntary companion, or for the malicious interpretation of the wise men and "fools who came to scoff," still lingering around their table.

Just as her patience was becoming exhausted, and she was meditating some biting sally of reproof, or bold sally from her imprisonment, a voice whispered in her ear, "Miss Willingham, will you give me leave to conduct you to your sister, who has met with a trifling accident?" and on turning hastily round, she found herself to have been actually addressed by "the man of mystery." Now to Eleanor's heart the name of *sister* presented only the image of Claudia; who had grown up with her to womanhood, and was of course more immediately connected with her impulses of feeling than a girl of Minnie's age. Starting, therefore, from her seat, she accepted the stranger's proffered arm without further question or delay; and it was not until she had rushed several paces from the tent that she found breath to exclaim — "Surely nothing serious has occurred? — I left Claudia with my mother — surely ——"

"I was wrong, perhaps, to startle you by the word *accident*," replied her companion in a pacifying tone. "Minnie is not hurt — nor even much alarmed; but as I could not find Lady Maria, and as *your* retreat was immediately pointed out to me, I thought it more proper — more becoming — that *you* should lend her your assistance than ——"

"Thank God! thank God!" — interrupted Eleanor, with the deep inspiration of a person relieved from painful alarm. "I was apprehensive that my eldest sister had

been seized with a sudden illness; — her health is extremely delicate — extremely precarious;" and as this involuntary avowal passed her lips, the tears burst from her oppressed heart.

Her mysterious companion seemed surprised and touched by her emotion, for he resumed his explanation with a softened voice and manner. "Again I ought to apologise for having unnecessarily alarmed you. I used the word 'sister,' as the most instant mode of exciting your attention, and withdrawing you from your companions."

"And my sister Minnie?" faltered Eleanor, painfully aware of a certain emphasis laid on the latter word.

"I could not succeed in dissuading her from accompanying Stapylford in one of those absurd nautilus pleasure-boats, which appear to have been prepared for no other purpose than the possible chance of drowning some of his guests; when fortunately, just as Minnie was seated, and before they had left the shelving of the shore, Stapylford's Newfoundland dog, who is accustomed to accompany his master in his yacht, leapt into the boat, and it was upset in a moment."

Eleanor uttered a cry of consternation.

"Pray do not be alarmed — the accident had not one heroic symptom! — They were not out of their depth — not three feet from the shore; and although I was standing by, I had not a moment's opportunity to jump in, for the gratification of being termed 'Minnie's gallant preserver' during the remainder of my days; — with an extended arm I was enabled to seize her dress, and draw her to the turf."

"She must have been dreadfully frightened."

"By no means! — After laughing heartily at the adventure, she was alarmed at nothing but the prospect of Lady Maria's displeasure. Minnie is not old enough for the sentimental terrors of a heroine."

Eleanor, now re-assured on all sides, began to think the tall, fair, taciturn young gentleman extremely familiar and impertinent; and to doubt whether she had not been made the subject of a hoax.

"Your sister was too much encumbered by her wet

clothes to walk, and I therefore carried her in my arms to the lodge — where she was assisted by the assiduities of Stapylford and the porter's wife ; — we shall be there in five minutes."

"You are right in supposing that mamma will be greatly displeased by her giddiness — by all this exposure among strangers," said Eleanor haughtily, in the hope of checking her companion's familiarity.

"Among strangers ? — pardon me ! — but considering the extent of the throng assembled to-day at Ebury, I consider dear Minnie fortunate that her adventure occurred under no harsher inspection than that of her old playfellow — her plighted love ! "

"I was not aware that Lord Stapylford had already claimed that distinction," said Eleanor in an angry voice, and quickening her steps towards the lodge.

"Minnie must have grown very reserved lately, if she has learned to designate him by any other name," said the provoking stranger, laughing at her air of indignation.

"And *you*, sir," — said Eleanor, irritated beyond her patience, — "have you an equal claim upon my sister's confidence ? "

"Is it possible that you do not know me ? " said the stranger, apparently amazed in his turn. "Is it possible that you do not remember your cousin, Charles Willingham ? "

CHAPTER VIII.

These things are but toys ; but since the mighty ones will have them, it is better they should be graced with elegancy than adorned with cost. Dancing to song is a thing of great state and pleasure ; and let the scenes abound with light, especially coloured and varied. FRANCIS BACON.

BEFORE Eleanor reached the lodge, the misunderstanding had been mutually explained and laughed over ; and on their arrival they had the satisfaction of learning from Lord Stapylford, who had mounted guard over the door, that Minnie was lying down in an inner room, while her dress was undergoing the necessary process of drying under the hands of the porter's wife ; and that a glass of mulled

wine promised to secure her from all danger of a cold — the only danger she had, in fact, encountered.

Eleanor was glad that her meeting with the imprudent girl was secure from spectators; it would have vexed her that her newly found cousin should observe the want of sisterly feeling subsisting between them. Minnie had, in truth, found herself much more at her ease with her friend Lord Stapylford, and her cousin Charlie, than with the fair *élégante* who now stood beside her couch; and her first explanation was, "Eleanor, pray do not tell mamma! — dear Eleanor! — pray do not scold me!" — entreaties which, to her surprise, were promptly pacified by a promise of secrecy.

A whole hour having been claimed by the officious female administrant provided by Lord Stapylford to complete her reparations of the accident, it was agreed that, to avoid enquiry, the young host should return to his guests; that Minnie should be left to silence and repose, after the excitement attending her accident; and that Charles Willingham, who would not hear of deserting his cousins, should share poor Eleanor's temporary retirement from the pleasures of the *fête*. Instead of the comedy and tragedy, aquatic and pyrotechnic — instead of the ballet, and ball, and Tyrolian fair, which had allured her curiosity to Ebury — she was now condemned to endure the wood-smoke of a very picturesque, and consequently narrow and inconvenient, cottage-kitchen! But Eleanor no longer bewailed her destiny, nor laboured under the impatience with which she had found herself restricted to the society of Lord Cosmo and Mrs. Grandison; for Mr. Willingham appeared an intelligent and very lively companion. They had a thousand reminiscences to afford them topics of discourse; and Lady Maria's approaching journey, and Minnie's renewed domestication with her uncle's family, demanded a world of compliment on both sides. Long before the muslin frock and Leghorn bonnet had resumed their original grace and sleekness, Charles Willingham seemed to regret that his friend Lorimer's experience had forewarned him against the hollow heartlessness of his pretty cousin; and Eleanor was almost sorry to be aware that the heir of Heddeston was two years younger than herself; and to per-

ceive, on the removal of his hat, that time, which had so marvellously improved his address and brightened his intelligence, had done nothing towards the amendment of his sandy locks. But on the whole, the hour, which was nearly doubled by a well-timed slumber on Minnie's part, passed quickly and pleasantly away, in the estimation of all parties.

In the mean time Claudia, whose anticipations of pleasure at the Ebury *fête* had partaken of the languid listlessness characterising all her recent feelings, had been destined to share far more profusely in its actual amusements than the lively Eleanor. Very soon after Lady Maria's arrival, Mr. Willingham had presented himself, and had good-naturedly claimed the care of Minnie on her premature appearance in the fashionable world; and her mother having gladly installed herself with Lady Lorimer and one or two rheumatic chaperons in the choicest snuggery of the villa, Claudia was enabled to accept Lady Robert Lorton's offered arm, and to visit all the varying scenes, and join in the successive amusements of the day, — escorted by a little knot of fashionables of the highest order of *bon ton*. Lady Robert, it is true, was not in her most animated spirits; but her society was on that account only the more welcome to the subdued Claudia Willingham.

"I came here under a promise from Lady Barringhurst," she whispered to her young friend, as they stood contemplating the aërial tints overhanging a noisy *jet d'eau*, "that she should avoid and discourage Tichborne's attendance. Yet we had not been five minutes in the shrubbery before she disappeared; and I have not the least doubt we shall meet them together."

"It is generally understood that Mr. Tichborne's share in the Ebury *déjeûné* was undertaken on *her* account; and we could scarcely expect him to endure a public defeat by appearing without his liege lady on his arm."

"It was no less generally reported that our very green goose of a host — little Stapylford — projected the breakfast in compliment to myself; yet an air of frigid self-possession on my part has completely disconcerted him, and rescued me from his awkward attentions for the remainder of the day."

"Lord Stapylford is but a neophyte in his art — an inexperienced boy; who is just as well pleased to be running races with my sister Minnie, or forwarding a badger-hunt with his grooms, as to be ruining himself at hazard with Lord Atherley, or sunning himself in the smiles of Lady Robert Lorton."

"Very true! Mere kitten-play like his is tolerably easy of discomfiture. But believe me, Claudia — and time will confirm the lesson — *every* married woman who swerves from her duty must have originally provoked the temptation. Her position in the world is so sacred — so commanding — one single word from her lips in reproof, or betrayal, or threat of betrayal of the first declaration with which a libertine presumes to insult her, must be so alarming to *him*, and so effective towards her own preservation — that the offence is never repeated, save with the concurrence of its object. We *hear* of seduction and of victims to the art of mankind; but be assured that a *married* woman is a victim only to her own weakness or her own wickedness."

"Surely you are severe — surely whole years of devotion — of exclusive attachment ——"

"Are indeed powerful temptations towards a surrender of affection in return. But remember that there is a first step to every thing; and no man could acquire the self-resignation you describe, without very strong encouragement in the outset."

"Men are so vain! — so apt to misinterpret a woman's feelings."

"Where a woman is hallowed and guarded round by the duties and decencies of a married life, the case is too decided to admit of a moment's misinterpretation. In such an instance, *endurance* becomes encouragement; and the greatest and boldest *roué* never deceives himself, or persists, where the object of his pursuit is honest in her intentions of resistance."

"Surely you think Lady Barringhurst's principles ——"

"Excellent! and her intentions pure. But Lucy is an exception to almost every general rule, and her position is perilous indeed! She is so unobservant and unsuspicious of evil — so much too indolent even to examine into its

existence when others point it out to her notice, that the snake will have stung her to the very heart before she is aware that it has coiled around her. And then Lord Barringhurst is so engrossed by his political pursuits, and makes his domestic happiness so much a matter of routine, that under Tichborne's artful schooling I fear she will some day learn to reproach herself with having lavished her gentle tenderness upon a stone. Were any other man to venture upon the familiarities, and comments, and remonstrances she hears from *his* lips, Lady Barringhurst would be startled into a sense of her own dignity; and forbid him her house and her presence. But Tichborne is her first cousin;—she has no brother, and consequently regards *him* as a friend and protector—who is, in fact, her most dangerous enemy. All my pleasure in leaving England is marred by my apprehensions for dear Lucy Barringhurst!"

"Pleasure!" exclaimed poor Claudia, with a sigh. "What mortal creature can indulge in the delusion of such an anticipation, unless it be some inexperienced child, like poor little Minnie?"—Had she been candid, she would have added, "or some favourite of fortune, such as Lady Anastasia Burgoyne?" but that was a name which Claudia never ventured to pronounce!—and even its secret recurrence to her mind was apt to produce, as on the present occasion, a deep, deep sigh of bitterness!

"I have been standing with my repeater in my hand, Lady Robert, these five minutes past," said Sir George Wolryche, now approaching them with Sir Comyne Wallace, Mr. Mulgrave, and Mr. Ducie, "repressing the eagerness of my companions, who want to attract you towards our miniature Tyrol—our Rhœtian Alps. I assure you the effect of your attitude was so picturesque, as you stood philosophising together beside the cascade, that I would have given worlds had Newton been present to immortalise the scene."

"I conclude you would have entreated him to paint us as two peacocks, dipping their gaudy trains into some fountain, *à la Watteau*," said Lady Robert Lorton, attempting to rally her spirits, and accepting his arm as she spoke.

" Or like Flora Mac Ivor and Cathleen at the waterfall," said Sir Comyne.

" There spoke the native Pict!—besides, Leslie has already transferred that bright imagining to canvass," replied Lady Robert. " No! no!—if ever Miss Willingham and myself condescend to bequeath our beauties to the fine arts, Claudia shall be portrayed as a wood-nymph about to encounter the dangers of the world, (of Ebury villas, for example,) and *I* as the Fairy Goodwill, applying the magic unguent to her eyes which disenchants all illusions."

" Making the cold reality too real!"

quoted Sir Comyne. " You can scarcely call yourself Miss Willingham's friend, unless you purpose leaving the picture a fancy piece."

" On the contrary, it will merely serve to commemorate a fact," replied Lady Robert, sportively, " and to make a frontispiece for an illuminated edition of Mrs. Chapone's works."

" Better reserve yourselves to embellish a landscape as pretty as that to which I am conducting you!" exclaimed Sir George Wolryche.

" Or if you are determined, like other blue-eyed goddesses, to play the Mentor," said Mr. Mulgrave, " take pity upon the delusions of poor Lady Radbourne;—on whom you may bestow your fairy ointment to the greatest advantage."

" I am not particularly interested in her reformation; she is a child of so very large a growth, that I am inclined to spare neither the rod, nor the cap and bells. But what foolery has her ladyship on hand just now?"

" Oh, she not only 'achieves folly,' but has folly 'thrust upon her,'" replied Mulgrave. " Our friend here, Sir George, and his co-mates of the Ebury *fête*, having driven the poor woman to utter distraction by their cruelty in withholding a card of invitation, the members of a certain club, which shall be anonymous, thought proper to promote a lucid interval by forging a most absurd letter in the names of the Eburyans, assuring her that Lady Radbourne alone was the object of their *déjeûner;* and that they had

only consented to appease the envy and jealousy of Ladies Robert Lorton, Barringhurst, and Rachel Verney, by rendering her triumph as secret as it was undeniable."

"Which letter she had, of course, the tact to treat as it deserved,—with silent contempt," said Claudia Willingham, honestly indignant at the imposition.

"With silent contempt!" reiterated Mr. Mulgrave: "Lady Radbourne knows not the cunning art of silence; and treats nothing with contempt but her husband and his humdrum relations. Oh no! she laid the flattering unction to her soul!—persuaded Radbourne to give her a new set of horses for the occasion; and is coming here in state with flying plumage and colours."

"Extremely impertinent!" ejaculated Sir George.

"Nay!—surely she is rather 'sinned against than sinning,' in the present instance," observed Lady Robert. "A woman with far more tact than Lady Radbourne might be imposed upon by so gross a breach of the laws of society."

"Certainly; the impertinence *I* reprobate is wholly on the side of the inventors of this dainty project. But they will be disappointed; it shall never be said that any woman, whether in or out of fashion, was treated with insolence at Ebury. Sir Comyne!—pray give your arm to Lady Robert, while I hasten to despatch some person to be stationed at the gate, in order to secure Lady Radbourne's admittance with her forged ticket."

"Bravo! Sir George—bravo!" exclaimed both his female companions. "The times of chivalry are not altogether past; and we have one true knight yet remaining to defend our cause."

"Is it possible you can be deceived by all this affected exuberance of zeal?" exclaimed Sir Comyne. "Wolryche knows as well as I do that Lady Radbourne has been parading the gardens these two hours past; having been received at the gate with especial honours by myself and Stapylford."

"And by the way, dear Claudia," said Lady Robert, "we were ourselves surpassingly stupid to overlook so glaring a fact. Surely you remember, as we were standing by the platform to admire '*Les dames blanches*' of the

quadrille of beauty, a stately figure in a *cerise* coloured dress, crowned by one of those *ultra-merveilleux* hats — a sort of labyrinth of blonde and feathers and flowers — which poor Maradan says she is obliged to invent to appease the ravenous appetite for finery of the ladies of 'the monied interest.' That mass of gorgeous frippery must inevitably have been poor Lady Radbourne herself!"

"Do you know, Wolryche," observed Mr. Ducie, "that you stand accused of a secret inclination for this colossal edition of the Venus de Medicis; and that you — even you — are suspected of having invented the club-hoax, by way of a screen to favour her admittance."

"To what purpose?" enquired Sir George. "We had each a hundred tickets placed at our distribution; and I had only to declare Lady Radbourne one of the goddesses of my choice to ensure the insertion of her name on the list."

"You forget the general ballot," whispered Sir Comyne.

"Nay! you must acknowledge that you all four found me too accommodating with respect to your own selections, to affect fastidiousness touching a solitary instance of my bad taste."

"Which of you boasts the honour of having proposed poor Adelaide Verney, who was blackballed for being 'too ugly, and not sufficiently blue?'" enquired Claudia.

"Oh! we are upon honour — ours was a secret committee; or all the ugly, and dowdy, and cross, and common-place, whom we have 'damned to everlasting fame' by our rejection, would enter singly into the lists against their adversaries. But be assured, Miss Willingham, that dare we but produce our *catalogue raisonné* of the excluded, with the motives — the whys and wherefores — candidly annexed — it would form a document as worthy of immortalisation as Domesday Book, or the Golden Bull."

A sudden exclamation of delight from Lady Robert Lorton suspended the course of their gossiping. They had reached the Tyrolian village; and a person even less susceptible of pleasurable emotions from trifling causes might have been moved to similar expressions of wonder and gratification by the effect of the picturesque scene which now burst upon their view. On the steep bank of a brawling brook, which traversed one of the thorny glades of Ebury

Park, the wooden tenements of an Alpine village had been hastily constructed. A finger-post pointed out the entrance to Lortonsdorf; bleaching-huts were scattered along the margin of the stream;—booths containing wooden toys;—belts embroidered with the feathers of the white peacock, and other trifles of Tyrolian manufacture, were erected before the balconied cottages;—a group of male peasants were busy with their cross-bows, attempting to bring down the triumphal garland suspended to the top of a lofty fir-pole;—while a knot of Tyrolian girls, represented by a tolerably well appointed detachment of the Opera chorus, advanced to welcome their fair visitants with the national *chorlied* of "*Wenn im morgen fröh aufstehe*"—and to place at the feet of Lady Robert a basket of the choicest flowers and fruits, and a beautiful collection of specimens of the different wares scattered among the booths of the fair.

Her ladyship, meantime, with the brightened eye of gratified vanity, was not slow to perceive that, although the turfen paths of Lortonsdorf were already crowded with the fairest and noblest of her rivals, it was to herself alone that a similar homage had been tendered; an homage which, connected with the dawning passion of "our very green goose of a host, that silly boy Stapylford," ought certainly to have been accepted as little less than a declaration. Yet so far from feeling inclined to mount the stilts of offended virtue which she had been prescribing—and with perfect good faith—in Lady Barringhurst's case, Lady Robert was enchanted by so flattering a distinction. Nay, she was even for a moment both surprised and vexed that her "*Narcisetto*" had bequeathed to other hands the care of conducting her to the spot, and gathering the first-fruits of her surprise. It would have astonished her still more, and vexed and disappointed her perhaps a little, had she known that, from the moment of his darling Minnie's unexpected appearance, Lord Stapylford had not bestowed a single thought upon the more mature enchantress for whom the fashion of the hour had tempted him to fancy himself into an unhappy passion!

But even to Claudia Willingham, whose opinions were not exalted into enthusiasm by the suggestions of vanity, Lortonsdorf, illuminated by a declining summer sun, and

presenting its national costume in striking contrast with the modish modern elegance of its host of lovely visitants, offered a scene as attractive as it was striking. At the distance of a few hundred yards from the village, the gushing brook flung itself from the ravine in which it was embedded, into the shadowy recesses of a coppice of Spanish chestnuts; while here and there, beneath the giant oaks standing in scattered dignity on the outskirts of the grove, herds of deer, which had been scared from their accustomed haunts by the idlers of the *fête*, stood huddled together in patient wonderment, or crouched in lazy groups among the furze and the harebelled herbage.

On arriving at Lortonsdorf, and catching a first glimpse of this enchanting landscape, all the lovely guests, without exception, had indulged in the usual vocatives in use on such occasions. "How exquisite! — how deliciously imagined! — what a fairy land! — what delicate invention! — How delighted Lady Robert Lorton must feel! — She must certainly have been in the secret! — How I envy her first *coup d'œil!* — For my part I could live here all my life! — How grievous that so pretty a village should be temporary! — I shall never — never be able to tear myself away from Lortonsdorf." But scarcely were their raptures interrupted by the first stroke of the gong announcing that the *déjeûner* was served, when every single party was seen scudding towards the villa — yea, and without so much as casting one lingering look behind!

Lady Robert's party meanwhile, who, like the man about to be broke on the wheel, "*ne se pressoit pas, puisque le spectacle ne pouvait devancer son arrivée*" — deserted the spot leisurely, and with regret. Satisfied that the honours of a sufficient variety of *potages, patés, marinades,* and *salmis,* would be reserved for the founders of the feast, they allowed themselves time to bestow a regretful gaze upon the fanciful scene which was about to dissolve, "like the baseless fabric of a vision!" — Like Adam, they sorrowed at the gates of Paradise.

But, as they approached the dinner tents, and mingled with many a graceful group, returning, like themselves, from the witcheries of the Tyrolian fair, they were not a

little amused by the fragments of commentation which reached their ears. "After all, the factitious character of the thing bordered on the ridiculous!—*Poor Lortonsdorf!*—all floor-cloth, from Downing's manufactory in the King's Road! And then, the *corps de ballet* looked so hideous by daylight! Did you remark Mademoiselle Pauline, and Zephyrette, and Clara, and fat Miss Neville, with the thick legs, who sings in all the choruses, and is called the Omnibus? It was all so out of character—so inconsistent with the time and place! Commend me to a milk-maid with carmine, and false hair, and pearl powder! And the Tyrolian churns, with 'Tompkins, 12. Regent Street,' stamped upon them! And the hay-forks, with 'by the king's letters patent,' engraved on brass plates upon the handles! How very ludicrous!—what a complete failure!"—"That wooden village will cost Lord Stapylford a fall of timber!"—"After all, the most wooden part of the whole affair must have been his own head! Never mind; he will carve a trap out of that, to catch that silly little Lady Robert Lorton!"—"At least, his lordship has the merit of being 'L'Amphytrion *où l'on dine;*' and thank heaven here we are at the end of our journey, and at the end of our gewgaw morning of starvation. Let us secure places, and attack the soup;—we have reached the only tangible pleasure of the day. Long live the hosts of Ebury!"

But even this gross and tangible pleasure proved evanescent. The process of mastication has its period; and champagne, however artfully iced, cannot be eternally prolonged in the act of deglutition. To smoking soup, and glowing *purées*, succeeded the saccharine glories of many a *caramel* temple, enwreathed with pistachio laurels, and crowned with roses of melting marmalade; the bastille frowned in spun sugar; and the trocadero spread its battlements over billows of *crême à la Vanille;* and when these had vanished, under the victorious attacks of many a fastidious spoon, *macédoines* and *glaces bombés aux millefleurs* took their turn for sneering condemnation.

"Gunter has not exerted himself to-day—the *coup de maître* is wanting—'Immortal Robert' has not found himself *en verve* this season."

"Gunter!—Do you think the Ebury conclave so *banal* as to employ a person we may all have by paying for? They sent for four *confiseurs* from the Rue des Lombards, and a *decorateur* from the Rue Vivienne! Lord Stapylford allowed his own *glacier* to officiate, (*un glacier en i, bien entendu,* who arrived from Milan last autumn,) and all the *apprets diablotins,* and *dragées* were forwarded by the ambassador's bag."

"They say the despatches were *bien sucrés!* in consequence; and that two autographs, dated from the *bureau des affaires étrangères,* were quite a *brouillade* from being steeped in *sirop de cédrat.*"

"Oh, I can discern a very diplomatic acidity in these very *pralines!* Lady Rachel, have not these wafers a sort of Talleyrandical *goût?*"

"*Il me semble que vous cherchez de loin!* I have very little doubt they borrow their odious flavour from the van of a Wimbledon carrier, and a truss of musty English hay."

"Grandville! prithee catch the eye or the sleeve of that gaping monster of a *maître d'hotel,* and enquire whether our constitutions are to be endangered by peach-ice without a *chasse?*"

"If you want *liqueurs,* I beg to assure you that Captain Macneill and Meredyth have been quaffing *crême de marron,* in claret glasses, for the last quarter of an hour; and, judging from appearances, I should decide that it was full five degrees hotter than the soup."

"Oh, I have it from the best authority, that the *potages* were iced by mistake."

"Nothing can be more probable," said Lady Rachel, laughing; "for an attendant, with ungloved and dirty hands, favoured me just now with some Curaçoa jelly, dancing the *galopade* on a very hot plate."

"The same unprincipled caitiff, doubtless, who offered me Parmesan with my *Julienne;* and inflicted *sauce piquante* upon Atherley, with *poulet au velouté!*"

"We must not be hypercritical," said Lady Rachel, observing that Wolryche and Wallace were approaching.

"*Ménage de célibataire*, like matrimony, is always taken for better and for worse."

"Oh, I am as little difficult as any fellow breathing; but a '*worse*' which includes a dinner in July, without the relief of Seltzer water, appears to me to *passer la permission*."

"Be pacified! you had four tumblers of iced hock."

"Iced hock! I mistook it for the pyroligneous acid invented by Beaufoy, which 'smells so wooingly' when we cross Vauxhall Bridge, on a midsummer day."

This croaking colloquy was now interrupted by some delicious glees, breathed from orchestras of unseen musicians; and as common politeness necessitated a temporary silence among the audience, they consoled themselves by a still severer burst of discontent on the close of the strain.

"Music!—*nothing* but music!—stunned with French horns on the water—deafened by the brass band of the Life Guards all dinner time—and now the indigenous screech-owls of the Lyceum, by way of dessert! What an intolerable bore."

"And then those terrible old English glees! as common-place as a charity sermon; and worthy of nothing but Freemasons' Hall, or a theatrical fund dinner."

"Music may be the food of love—but 'tis a deuced meagre food for the hungry."

"Moving already?—Lady Rachel, allow me to assist you in the recovery of your gloves and handkerchief.—Yes! positively—they are crowding down to the lake at the imminent risk of dyspepsia!—I was really in hopes our locomotive labours were closed for the day."

In these hopes it appeared that Lady Robert Lorton shared not; for while the gentlemen still lingered over their claret, she persuaded Claudia Willingham to accompany her, once more, on a tour through the shrubberies in search of the truant Lady Barringhurst. "I should not be the least surprised," said she, "to find her dining *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Tichborne in one of those kiosks; or at the upper stage of the pagoda."

"Surely she would not hazard so bold a defiance of etiquette for so trifling a gratification."

"The appearance of the thing would probably never occur to her until the mischief was done. A woman of Lucy's *pococurante* disposition becomes indiscreet through thoughtlessness; and finding her character unjustly aspersed, finally becomes culpable through desperation."

"And as our Parisian proverb runs, '*se jette dans la rivière pour éviter l'orage.*'"

"Precisely! and I wish I knew *as* precisely what covert to beat for my snared partridge. I have met Mrs. Grandison repeatedly in the course of the morning, braving the censures of the world, on Lord Cosmo's arm. However, *she* has some excuse; for fool as she is in her self-exposure, her husband is the far greater ninny."

"It is really diverting to see poor little fussy, stuffy, simpering Mr. Grandison, trudging about with his wife's Cachemere on his arm; delighted the fine ladies should see that Bessy has a lord for her lover, and is as bad as themselves."

"Oh, Bessy Grandison's lover, for the time being, is always the object of her husband's idolatry. Grandison is so proud when he can seize his arm in St. James's Street, or cash his drafts, or exercise his horses, or laugh at his witticisms! In Lisborough's reign, I remember he made himself running footman to the whole family; I used to send him down in the rain to King Street, whenever Willis forgot to forward my tickets; and as to Charlotte Grayfield, she made him subscribe to every charitable institution from Bayswater to Moorfields, and procure a Pomeranium puppy for her from his correspondent at Riga. You cannot imagine how he loved us all."

"I suppose he will purchase a majority for Lord Cosmo, or pay off his balance at Crockford's."

"It will surprise me infinitely if Somerset does not become disgusted with Mrs. Grandison long before he gets credit enough with the little banker to settle even with his tailor. Barbara Desmond is looking lovely to-day, with her violet eyes and raven tresses; '*et l'on revient toujours à ses premiers amours*' when the love is innocent and honourable, and its object beautiful."

They were overtaken by the dew and the dusk while still

pursuing their unsuccessful search through the musky thickets of the shrubbery ; and on being conducted towards the villa by the assiduity of their former chevaliers, they were startled by the illuminated *façade*, on which the legend of

HONNEUR AUX DAMES

appeared in golden lamps, encircled by a refulgent glory !

On entering the ball-room, a still more exquisite *coup d'œil* burst upon their view. The walls, which were covered by a dazzling surface of spotless white scagliola, were decorated with garlands and trophies of natural roses of every variety of die ; — the stalks being invisibly refreshed by tubes containing water, while beneath the lofty chandeliers, draperies of filmy and waving muslin were interposed to modify the blaze of light. The musicians were concealed within bowers of blossoming orange trees ! and attendants from time to time unostentatiously sprinkled the dancing floor with *arrosoirs* full of *esprît de bouquet à la glace*.

As they entered the scene of enchantment, the first living object which arrested the eye of Claudia was the buoyant figure of her sister Minnie, with her *robe à l'enfant* and dishevelled tresses, flying through the waltz upon Lord Stapylford's arm ; while a thousand exclamations of rapturous delight from the crowd around her attested the matchless fascination of her youthful loveliness and animation. — " Have you seen the new beauty ? " — " What do you think of the Venus in her teens ? " formed the burden of general conversation. The string of gregarious Life-guardsmen were crowding forward according to their usual system, for a simultaneous regimental presentation ; and Lord Ormany, the commander-in-chief of the *roués*, the examining censor whose vote is indispensable to neophytes standing for their degree of beauty, had already pronounced that " little Willingham would far outshine Lady Barbara Desmond, Lady Barringhurst, Princess Sciarrha, or any other among the decided beauties of the day." Claudia was amazed ! — the triumphs of the Cenerentola were already beginning.

"Lady Maria Willingham's train of lovely daughters seems as interminable as Banquo's vision of crowned heads," said tuft-hunting Captain Macneill, to a dowager, to whose dinners — prospective and retrospective — he was in the habit of devoting his pompous attentions. "And still the last is first."

"Poor little girl!" exclaimed the irritated dowager-chaperon, with a glance towards her own two gaunt pillars of Hercules, who were frowning unpartnered on the scene. "Poor little innocent! — how she must long to be in bed and asleep. I conclude Lady Maria will present her in a bib and tucker at the next drawing-room: as she did not favour us with a sight of her elder flowers till they had run to seed, she seems resolved that her new rose should enchant us in the bud. Very ill-judged, indeed!"

"Oh, the Willinghams are going abroad to-morrow; and this little fairy is to be guarded in some lay-cloister till their return."

"Umph! — her Ladyship condescends to dazzle us with a glance at the comet, in order that we may busy ourselves with computing the period of its re-appearance.— Umph!"

"She must look about her in the interim for another duke; and bait the hook more cunningly than she did for his grace of Lisborough."

"On the contrary, too much cunning ruined the cause. The fly was made so very, very tempting, that the eager dupe swallowed it too voraciously — and it stuck in his throat! — Ah, my dear Miss Claudia! how do you do? We have been admiring your charming little sister — quite a miniature of yourself! — Lord Stapylford appears desperately smitten!" — (behind her hand) "forty thousand a year, you know, my dear! besides the savings of his minority. On second thoughts, I scarcely recommend it— *écarté* and *post obits* have made a mere skeleton of the property! — Lady Robert! I am enchanted to get near you — I have not been able to exchange one word with you to-day."

"Thank you, my dear Lady Peewit, for your kind intentions; but my own stock of words is nearly exhausted.

I set off to Spa in the morning; and my trunks and my discourse are sealed up by the customs, until I have passed the frontier."

"How is my friend Lord Robert?"

"Well."

"And the dear children?"

"Well, too."

"And where is Lord Robert to-night?"

"At Dover."

"At Dover — and why?"

"That my friends the Willinghams, and the Willinghams' friend Sophia Lorton, may sleep at the York Hotel to-morrow night, without fear of the rheumatism. Come — come, dear Claudia; — take care of me across the room; for I see a vacant seat by Lady Maria, and I must make my final arrangements with her about our hour of starting."

CHAPTER IX.

Do *you* set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? — Fie! Fie! Fie!

Henry IV. Second Part.

It has been shrewdly said, that were any human being enabled by some magic chance to contemplate its own person after an insensible interlapse of ten years, the change would appear incredibly awful; and that we should, on such a revelation of our decadence, inevitably feel tempted to disown ourselves. The daily reflections of the looking-glass, indeed, are only varied by the gentle and imperceptible gradation of from night till morning—from morning until another evening; and we grow old in happy unconsciousness of the swollen features, the deepening wrinkles, the deadening glances, and the wasting limbs. A beauty may sometimes ostentatiously exclaim, "Ah, I am sadly altered!" but she appeases her wounded vanity by a secret whisper of "at least I am not looking well *to-day;*" and is apt to transfer the blame to Dévy or to Girardot; — to an unbecoming hat, or an ill-fitting dress. Beaux, too,

have been heard to acknowledge—"By Jove! I am not the fellow I was!—I was weighed the other day at the Cocoa-tree, and I find I am growing quite a corpulent, middle-aged man!"—But then comes the palliative:—"The fact is, the weather has been so deuced bad, that the hounds have not been out thirty times this season; and want of exercise plays the very devil with the constitution!"

But however we may succeed in deceiving ourselves, we deceive not others by these dainty devices and equivocations. Our neighbours and friends perceive the hobble in the gait, which *we* are wont to attribute to the incidental misery of a tight shoe; and attribute the spectacles or *lorgnette* which *we* claim in honour of our near-sightedness, to the evolutions of the remorseless glass of time. The "*ci-devant jeune homme*"—the "*jeune dame qui a été jeune si longtemps,*"—are accurately dated in the envious kalendar of many a contemporary and impartial friend; and while we affect to wonder at the unseemly apparition of our *first* grey hair, our kinsfolk and acquaintance agree in a secret persuasion that it has only escaped the chemical ensablement disguising all the rest of the *chevelure*. Some, indeed, presume to suggest that "there is a time for all things;" "that wigs are an admirable invention;" and that "to this conclusion must we come at last!"

My readers are at this moment perhaps accusing my very self of the increasing garrulity of age; and maliciously insinuating that I am growing suspiciously prosy in this laboured digression. The truth is, that like a charlatan in the preparation of his tricks, I am attempting to divert the attention for a moment from the personages and subject of my story;—I wish them to turn away their heads a moment, that the fountain which disappeared at Elis may have time to rise in Sicily;—I am attempting to distract their notice by a flourish of idle trumpets, during the period intervening between "Wallenstein's camp," and "Wallenstein's death." Although I am fully aware that the literary syncope is an unpopular mode of composition, I have two powerful instances wherewith to back my apology—the last volume of the Old Mortality of Scott, and the exquisite Simple Story of Mrs. Inchbald. In the whole range

of romance, I know not a more pathetic transition than from Miss Milner's wedding-day to her death-bed, from her innocent youth to her guilty maturity, as hazarded in that interesting work.

But I perceive that my readers are at length becoming alarmed as well as impatient. They are apprehensive of some over-bold demand upon their forbearance; — they imagine that like the Duchess of Malfy, in Marlowe's tragedy, I shall favour them with the production of a fine family of sixteen children between the acts; or, in emulation of the admirable Potier, display the change between manhood and old age in the vicissitude of half a minute. But, for my own part, I am more moderate. Five years is the utmost stretch of imagination I presume to exact from my gentle lectors; praying them to believe that my motive for this condensation of time is to spare them the prolonged monotony of unsuccessful match-making, and *parti* hunting — of "dead sets" made at successive heirs, and eldest sons — followed by the endless disappointments and smiling vexation of defeated coquetry.

It was on the 25th of April, 1830, that Lady Maria Willingham and her three daughters landed for the second time on the Dover pier, exactly four years and nine months after the Ebury *fête champêtre;* — and a simple record of this solitary fact will, I trust, induce my readers to acknowledge that my prosy preamble was not without a sufficient motive. Lady Maria was grown old, and fretful, and selfishly careful of her health — but was utterly unsuspicious of any such alterations. Claudia and Eleanor had lost the buoyant spring of youth, and were becoming faded and factitious in their appearance; yet they were blind to the changes of time, and only the more desperately bent upon a final matrimonial effort during the approaching London season. Minnie — Minnie alone — had progressed into a fuller exuberance of beauty! The lovely girl had expanded into an enchanting woman; and what was far more to the purpose in the estimation of her family, and of many of her friends — *poor* little Minnie had become *a rich heiress!*

Now although the former facts are sufficiently consequent

and comprehensible, this latter statement is of so startling a character, that I shall venture, in explanation, on a brief *résumé* of the events of the interval; looking back upon the past with the same bird's eye glance of retrospection with which we are enabled to concentrate the last five years of our own individual reminiscences, into a mental half inch of aërial perspective.

The projected excursion to Spa had not proved ineffective. Lady Robert Lorton had succeeded in dissipating her *ennuis;* and Claudia, in the sparkling springs of the Pouhon, had renovated the fountains of exhausted health, if not of faded self-content. The flush of youth which dawned anew upon her cheek had at least incited her to dream of fresh conquests; and if she did not in secret cease to regret Calmersfield, and sigh after its duke, it is certain that more than one heir-apparent became the object of her speculations in the course of the ensuing winter at Paris. Vexed and disappointed beyond measure by the event of their unsuccessful London campaign, the Willinghams had succeeded in persuading Lord and Lady Robert Lorton — who had their own motives of distaste for a premature return to England — to remove from Spa to the Chaussée d'Antin, and for once attempt the varieties of a Parisian season. And when at the close of the Carnival, Lord Robert began to talk of "a call of the House," and Lady Robert to sigh for Arlington Street, it was discovered that hot rooms and the *galopade* had renewed the symptoms of Claudia's indisposition; and Lady Maria judiciously contrived that Dr. Gall should instantly favour her own wishes and her own finances, by prescribing a summer in Switzerland, and a winter in Italy, for her daughter's final restoration.

Who does not know the fascinations of Florence — with its diplomatic hospitality — its private theatricals — its unostentatious court — and literary resources? — Who that has dreamed away six happy months beside the Arno, does not feel inclined, like the Willinghams, to refresh themselves during the summer season at Pisa, or Lucca, or Leghorn; and return for a second winter to the society of the Burghershes, and Normanbys, and the happy circles which

they enliven? Lady Maria having accurately discerned that every young nobleman on the grand tour betakes himself to a temporary residence at Schneider's hotel—and that every English millionary, on his road to St. Peter's or Vesuvius, unfailingly seeks an abiding place for a time in the *Lung' Arno*, was quite satisfied that she had posted herself on "a coigne of 'vantage," for the pursuance of her matrimonial manœuvres; and although Lord Basingstoke flirted to desperation with Claudia for a fortnight, and then went his way to the Vatican—and although Eleanor had all but netted Sir Timothy Omnium—who, on the expected eve of a declaration, had flown off on the rumour of a tempting subterraneous rumble audible at Caserta—yet she had been slow to discover that of all birds, birds of passage are the most difficult to bring down.

In the mean time she was still better satisfied with the position occupied at Heddeston Court by her youngest daughter. Lady Willingham indeed had died during their Swiss autumn;—a victim, it was said, to the frigid virtue of not allowing her dressing-room fire to be lighted before Michaelmas day. But her maternal duties were replaced, and more than replaced by the gentle Mary; who now presided over Sir Joseph's establishment, and under whose tender fosterage the virtues and charms of her cousin Minnie had been cherished into the very perfection of female loveliness. Many persons asserted, and many travellers bearing letters of introduction to Italy attested to her cousins, that Mary herself had been equally benefitted by the collision; and that through the exertions necessitated by her Mentorial responsibility, she had polished away the reserve of her own demeanour, and acquired a degree of graceful self-possession—the only charm missing among the many which embellished her truly feminine character.

This, however, was a fact which Lady Maria could never suffer herself to believe or admit; and the satisfaction she derived from Minnie's domestication at Heddeston arose neither from Miss Willingham's acknowledged superiority of mind and manners, nor even from her brother's triumphant position in the world; although Charles had already

distinguished himself by his maiden speech, and attracted the favourable notice of all the leading politicians of the day. Notwithstanding the seeming eligibilities of such a match, Lady Maria had never included her nephew among her matrimonial projects for the daughter she had abandoned. She would have altogether despised poor Charles Willingham for a son-in-law; inasmuch as, from Minnie's earliest years, she had entertained well-grounded expectations of seeing her become the wife of the idle, dissolute, selfish, unfeeling Lord Stapylford!

Unfortunately her daughter's predilections served to confirm the plan. Distinguished from her childhood by the preference of the volatile Montague, Minnie had learnt to love her "*petit mari*" long before she understood the meaning of the term. Mary's sage remonstrances, aunt Willingham's rigid strictures, Sir Joseph's tedious reprobation, and even old Lady Monteagle's, and Lady Dynevour's and Lady Stapylford's impertinent interference, had only tended to strengthen her original feelings in his favour. Secretly supported in her obstinacy by Lady Maria's epistolary encouragement, Minnie's attachment had gone through the usual process of clandestine correspondence, and clandestine engagement; and as her lover was restrained by the will of the late lord from the enjoyment of his property before attaining the age of twenty-three, and as the present Lord Stapylford maintained a steadfast intimacy with Mr. Tichborne, and a close connection with Messrs. Presswell, Screw, and Company, there seemed every probability that the young nobleman's fortune, and his minority, would diminish in sympathetic unison.

Of this circumstance, however, Lady Maria Willingham, from her residence on the Continent, was only partially aware; while her daughter, living in rural seclusion at Heddeston, persuaded herself that every rumour to "dear Stapylford's" disadvantage arose from the malice of their neighbour, his Monteagle grandmother; and from the prudish severity of Mary's principles.

> While every tongue his follies nam'd,
> She fled the unwelcome story,
> Or found in e'en the faults they blam'd
> Some gleams of future glory!

His profusion she called generosity; his excesses originality; his libertinism, the exaggerated invention of ill nature. While Lord Stapylford was driving his mistress in the Park, Minnie was quietly and unsuspectingly occupied with her sketch-book among the beech-woods of Heddeston — satisfied that her affianced lover was a miracle of constancy; and while he was losing thousands and tens of thousands by the "hazard of the die," his confiding Minnie was assuring her absent mother and sisters, that "Montague was every thing she could wish; and that every affectionate letter marked more eagerly than the last his impatience for the period of their final union." — Poor little Minnie! she was destined to be as easy a dupe as all the most amiable portion of her confiding sex are, alas! only too commonly rendered by the duplicity of mankind.

Meantime, Lady Monteagle grumbled and scolded; Charles, his former friend, was severely silent, — and the gentle Mary disconsolately shook her head. They saw that — in spite of Minnie's doting confidence, and in spite of Lord Stapylford's obstinate adherence to his courses of wild profusion — a fatal day of reckoning was approaching for both.

The twenty-third birthday, so anxiously anticipated by all parties, at length arrived. Lord Stapylford was declared to be of age — and a ruined man! Executions from a hundred different quarters besieged his town-house; while the mortgagees took possession of Stapylford Park. His lordship entertained serious thoughts of shooting himself; but on being roused by the information that his principal sultana had carried herself and her diamonds to Paris, under Mr. Tichborne's protection, he consoled himself by uttering a thousand imprecations against his own folly, and by going to bed in a state of brutal intoxication.

On Minnie these overwhelming discoveries produced a very different effect. The delicacy of her age and sex had of course forbidden her participation in the knowledge of many of the most revolting features of the case; and as she had heard nothing of Mademoiselle Adolphine and the drunkenness, and much concerning the executions and mortgages, — concerning Montague's abandonment by

his friends, and Montague's crying necessities, — she had not failed to exalt him into a hero of romance — to weep during a whole sleepless night in contemplation of his unmerited afflictions — and to devote herself to him and his cause more vehemently than ever. Vainly did her uncle recite from the Morning Post, the following day at breakfast, a statement as clear, and candid, and awful, and implicatory — as dashes, and asterisks, and italics could make it — of the crimes, and misdemeanors, and fooleries of the ruined spendthrift; — Minnie Willingham shed a silent tear or two over her dry toast, and remained fixed in her resolve to share the miserable destinies of her beloved Stapylford! Vainly did Mary profit by her father's indignant exit from the breakfast-room, to point out, as delicately as she could, the selfish egotism of Montague's conduct; — the vices he had contracted in the loathsome society to which he had accustomed himself; — and his total disregard to the future interests and happiness of his affianced bride; — Minnie Willingham raised a reproachful glance towards her gentle cousin, implying an accusation similar to that uttered by the young Israëlite in Rossini's Italian opera, to the gaunt representative of Mose in Egitto. "Moses! *you* have never loved!" — For Minnie knew nothing of a certain Frederick Lorimer; and like all the rest of the county of Kent, had attributed Mary's rejection of the proposals of some dozen of its landed proprietors to constitutional indifference and coldness of heart.

All this time, however, poor Minnie had kept silence, even from good words. She entertained no intention of being convinced, and had no taste for hearing Lord Stapylford reviled; and she therefore wisely abstained from provoking further idle argument by verbal opposition. But when Mr. Willingham — who had hitherto contented himself with violently stirring his tea under a sense of contemptuous irritation, derived from all that was passing around him, or with lifting his eyes from the newspaper he was perusing, to throw a glance of disgust upon the sullen object of Mary's persuasive eloquence — burst into an involuntary exclamation of "Minnie, I am astonished at your

want of sense and want of feeling!" her indignation became seriously excited; and at last she spake with her tongue.

"You are extremely impertinent, Charles! as well as extremely unkind; and I beg to assure you that if Mary's counsels do not succeed in convincing me of my error, I certainly shall not turn for enlightenment to your own."

"Heaven knows I am little in the habit of forcing them upon you, or upon any one. As long as I had any hope of Stapylford's reformation—as long as I saw any chance of concealing his excesses from your knowledge—I allowed you to nourish your delusions. That time is past;—the whole world knows—as *I* have long known—that he is a ruined man—ruined by vice, and intemperance, and the grossest folly;—ruined even while he knew that the innocent affections of a confiding girl were involved in the catastrophe. Had he really loved you, Minnie—loved you as a woman ought to be loved—and ought to *desire* to be loved—this could not have been. Had he really loved you, the sharper and the wanton could not have been made his chosen companions. Often when, had he so willed it, he might have been by your side, sharing your occupations—your walks, your smiles, your tenderness—he preferred the fœtid atmosphere of the midnight hell—the orgies of Mr. Tichborne and his gang—the converse of the depraved and the depraving."

Minnie, provoked by those unanswerable facts, now attempted to disguise her emotions under a redoubled tide of recrimination.

"Your good information on all these topics only serves to confirm your own treachery. Had you not inveigled yourself into Stapylford's confidence by making yourself the companion of his thoughtless follies, you would have been unable to furnish this list of his offences. Methinks, Charles, that you, who affect to be so saintly and so philosophic in your pursuits, might have been better employed than in prying into the indiscretions of others in order to screen the indulgence of your own."

"You are unjust to my brother, dear Minnie," interrupted Mary, astonished by her petulance. "You know

that he tenders your interests with the same fervent regard he bestows upon my own, and that nothing but his eager interest in your welfare ——"

"I reject it — I abjure it altogether!" exclaimed Minnie, still more vehemently moved by the imperturbable equanimity of Charles Willingham. "While my cousin Charles kept up the hypocritical pretension of being Stapylford's friend, I had no objection that he should also remain my counsellor. But the days of deception are over; he has thrown off the mask — and, taken courage to avow himself the enemy of one who, if he disgraces himself by the indiscretions natural to his age, is at least free from the craftiness befitting maturer years! Yes, Charles — start and redden if you will! — but Montague Stapylford's enemies are mine also; — you have thrown down the gauntlet to us both, and henceforth I shall studiously teach myself to regard you as a stranger to my heart."

Mary literally gasped for breath; — she was persuaded that her brother's feelings would be either deeply hurt or deeply irritated by his cousin's unjust accusations and ungentle warmth, and she was all amazement to see him rise calmly from his seat, and leave the room; observing as he passed his cousin — but with a voice and demeanour equally undisturbed — "I forgive you, Minnie! for you are not yourself this morning, or you would shrink from the ingratitude of throwing off, on a moment's provocation, the affectionate — the forbearing friend of the last sixteen years! — I forgive you, my dear cousin, and even without appealing against your injustice. But remember, that should you feel inclined to call me again into your confidence — should you, when you find yourself neglected, and perhaps even abandoned, by this worthless object of your blind idolatry — should you at such a moment be disposed to call upon your cousin Charles for redress or sympathy — you will never find him wanting in your cause. God bless you, Minnie! — I wish I could soften the blow which I see about to fall on your innocent head."

Scarcely had he left the breakfast-room when Minnie, throwing herself into Miss Willingham's arms, attempted

to expiate her "ungrateful injury" by a flood of bitterly repentant tears. She accused herself of want of feeling, and (with some justice in the present instance) of want of temper; but she would on no account suffer her cousin Charles to be recalled in order to receive his share of her self-criminating apologies. "He was gone to the library," she said; — "was already busy with his books, and pamphlets, and tiresome politics; and had probably forgotten both herself and her offences in the interest of some odd volume of parliamentary annals."

It was not, however, his forgetfulness, but his kindness that Minnie feared to encounter. She knew that the merest expression of contrition on her part would be met on his with an effusion of brotherly tenderness such as she little merited — such as would only serve to soften her heart anew, and to re-open those sluices of tearful emotion for which she began to foresee full many a legitimate source. She was satisfied therefore to leave herself in the wrong, and obstinate, and ungrateful, in the opinion of her philosophical cousin.

CHAPTER X.

Now pray you seek no colour for your going,
But bid farewell, and go! When you sued staying,
Then was the time for words. No going then —
Eternity was on our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows bent. *Antony and Cleopatra.*

Mr. Willingham, meanwhile, neither resented the evil speaking and evil thinking of his cousin, nor would allow Mary to utter one syllable in reprehension of her pettish wilfulness. He was well aware that a world of undiscovered and unsuspected troubles remained in store for her; — he had a far deeper insight than herself or her family into the real character of Lord Stapylford.

In fact, it is only among men — and more especially among men of his own age and calling — that the secret disposition and innate tendency of a man's feelings can be justly appreciated; — to the other sex he manifests himself

only in his holyday suit of smiles and sunshine. In the temporary excitement of female society, the most ill-tempered man can smooth his brow into moderation; the coarsest can attune his speech into an assumption of delicacy; the unprincipled can shroud his designs under a mask of specious reserve; and the unfeeling assume the soft semblance of repressed emotions.

But among their brothers of the broad-cloth this hypocrisy can neither endure nor be endured. There is an electric chain revealing the invisible shock — there is a tacit freemasonry betraying the initiated — which admit of no disguise. In spite of well-mouthed principles of honour and moral rectitude, there circulates a sort of mysterious "hue and cry," revealing the names of defaulters, and the misdemeanors of unconvicted criminals — a species of club warning betraying the real character of every man of fashion and family about town; and a woman who is seriously bent upon ascertaining and appreciating the merits of her lover, may enlighten herself at once upon the subject, by noting the estimation in which he is held by those of his own sex and his own degree. A single *enquiry* will defeat her purpose; for few men, and no women, are to be regarded as unprejudiced witnesses; but a few instances of tranquil observation on her own part will supply her with particulars of evidence as ample as could be furnished by the most active Parisian Commissary of Police.

Charles Willingham, in his unrestrained intercourse with Lord Stapylford, had found a thousand motives for the relaxation of their boyish friendship. It was not his extravagance, his sensuality, or his devotion to libertine associates, by which he had thus disgusted the familiar companion of his early years; for Charles had many a friend equally dissipated in his habits, for whom he contrived to cherish an unfailing regard. But in Montague Stapylford he detected the traces of a cold and callous selfishness. Provided his own horse, his own dinner, his own wine, were assorted to his fancy, Lord Stapylford cared for the wants, the distresses, or the perplexities of no single person in the world! By a perpetual collision with such companions as Tichborne and Wolryche he had acquired this species of

moral self-defence against their innovations; the sole object of his existence was to escape the languid pause consequent upon over-excitement; and to secure himself a new diversion — a new toy — he would have sacrificed the interests and feelings of his friends, family, and associates, as well as his own reputation for honourable dealing and a gentlemanly demeanour. The best feeling he had ever allowed himself to cherish had been his early and disinterested attachment for Minnie Willingham; but even this her cousin Charles was persuaded he would sacrifice without remorse, at the very first instigation of his own caprices or of his own personal interests.

Nor was the trial of his lordship's stability long delayed. His utter ruin had formed a whole day's topic of conversation at all the clubs; where the items of Mivart's, and Milton's and Adams's, and Ebers's accounts, were very elaborately discussed. His more intimate friends were enabled to talk for full two days on the matter; for to *them* the expenses of Mademoiselle Adolphine's establishment, of his house at Melton, his shooting-box on the Moors, and his villa at Ebury, were accurately known. Others again — a chosen few — the *élite* of the *roués* — could garnish *their* edition of his predicament with a tariff of Presswell's rate of interest — with a private history of midnight transfers made at Crockford's after a third bottle of Château Margout; and with insinuations touching certain bonds and acceptances, in which the names of Tichborne — and ——, and * * * *, and ==, figured in a very mysterious manner. To all this gossipry succeeded the investment of the Stapylford property by the myrmidons of Messrs. Screw, Gripe, and Co., agents, of Great St. Helen's, London; and the subsequent advertisement of Messrs. Flourish, house-agents and auctioneers, "To Noblemen and Gentlemen," that they had been empowered by the assignees to let on lease, for a term of years, "that capital mansion known by the name of Stapylford Park; containing a suite of state chambers 434 feet in length; thirty-five best bed-rooms, and suitable offices; — together with a lake covering an extent of 1230 acres; with five thousand acres of land, strictly preserved; besides pineries, graperies, pheasantries, ice-houses, conservatories, observatories, menageries, avia-

ries, picture and sculpture galleries, &c. &c. &c. ; — &c. &c. &c."

Then came a three days' sale at Phillips's of the

" Private Collection of

A NOBLEMAN going abroad ;

Comprising his unrivalled cabinet of 550 snuff-boxes, besides cabinet pictures, *bijouterie*, and objects of *virtu*, collected at an incalculable expense, and to be disposed of without the least reserve." Then a five days' sale at Tattersall's ; the result of which offered enormous confirmation of the folly of the proprietor, and the chicanery of many a noble and honourable gentleman on whom he had bestowed his confidence. And finally there came a proposal from his lady-dowager-grandame that he should accept a cornetcy in the —— Hussars (on the point of embarkation to India) ; an appointment in the household of her noble cousin the governor-general (who generously offered him a passage out, in the frigate prepared for himself and family) ; and an allowance of five hundred a year from her noble self! On the contingency of his acceptance hung the further reversion of her fortune and estates ; which, as Lady Monteagle was seventy-three, and her daughters Stapylford and Dynevour had already fretted themselves into their graves, offered a very immediate prospect of redemption from his disasters ; while, on the event of his refusal awaited a pittance of three hundred a year, vouchsafed by his creditors — and an obscure and repining existence with his devoted Minnie !

Lord Stapylford did not hesitate ! — He did not even refer himself to the opinion and counsel and choice of his affianced bride. Nay, — instead of attempting to move Lady Monteagle's feelings in favour of their immediate union and co-expatriation to India, he contented himself with inditing a letter to Heddeston, stating that he was " on the point of embarking for Calcutta with Lord Melrose and his staff ; that he cherished a very remote hope of improving his fortunes with a view to the future fulfilment of his engagement ; that he would, if possible, pay a flying

visit to his dear Minnie on his way to the Downs; that he begged her miniature might be completed previous to his departure; and that he remained her affectionate and devoted "STAPYLFORD."

Minnie, as it may be imagined, was touched to the very quick by this summary decision! She was too proud, however, to remonstrate or repine; and received Lord Stapylford's visit of adieu with affectionate cheerfulness. She listened with patience to his enumeration of the nautical accommodations he had secured for himself; to his prospects of speedy military advancement; and even to his encomiums of the merits of Lady Melrose and her daughters. But as she finally bestowed her own picture and a parting kiss upon the affianced lover of her early years, she could not but remember how gladly — how *very* gladly — she would have shared his poverty in some European retreat, however humble — however squalid; or even braved the changes of climate and the terrors of the ocean for his sake. And it was many weeks after the "Owen Glendower, containing his excellency the Marquis of Melrose and suite," had sailed from Deal, before Minnie Willingham was seen to hold up her head, or heard to mingle in the conversation of the Heddeston fireside.

Minnie's frends — I use the word in its limited and veritable sense — however they might sympathise in her grief, and desire to spare her tears, were not the less resolute in their opinion that Lord Stapylford's heartless selfishness had been the means of redeeming her from a life of misery and dishonour; that not one spark of generosity — one trait of amiable feeling — served to brighten the mediocrity of her lover's character; — that he was a *roué* and a *polisson* — but not "an *amiable roué;*" and that Minnie, with all her beaming ingenuousness of mind, and graceful delicacy of feeling, could not in the end but have learned to despise, and perhaps to abhor, a being so totally opposed to her own principles and sentiments. Under such circumstances, her escape was great indeed!

There were three personages meanwhile — her *friends* in the *un*limited and social sense of the term — who enter-

tained a very different, or rather very *various* views of the subject. First there was the Lady Dowager Monteagle; who regarded herself as the true origin of Miss Maria's altered destinies. She had not sufficient discrimination to be aware that it was not *her* providential care of her grandson's fortunes — *her* proposals for disuniting him from his early love — but Lord Stapylford's own mode of acceptance, which had operated so painfully on the poor girl's feelings. Accordingly the crafty dowager, although she ceased not to congratulate herself upon the success of her manœuvres, was not without some certain qualms of conscience respecting her own evil dealing towards "a neighbour's child," and a creature so fair, so sweet, and so unoffending as Minnie Willingham — a creature, too, whom she had herself seen nestling in her cradle; and whom many predicted she would now live to see in her death-shroud, — and laid there, too, by the premature sufferings of a broken heart!

There often mingles a curious sort of mental restlessness with the sins of threescore years and ten. Elderly people — particularly such as are in the habit of hebdomadally shedding their penitential tears at the Lock Chapel — are apt to wrestle with the long-indulged suggestions of their frailer nature with self-reproving feebleness. Clinging to the vanities of a world on which they feel their tenure to be slight indeed, and attempting to steer a middle course between mortal and immortal aspirations, they dare the destiny of all other trimmers — even that of being depised on one side, and rejected on the other!

Lady Monteagle was beginning to be really uneasy about the health of her supposed victim. She seldom visited Heddeston Court without a packet of "genuine extract of quinine, prepared by the celebrated Majendie himself;" and even went the liberal length of enriching Sir Joseph's cellar with some fine old Malaga — (of a date nearly as ancient as that of Sir William Wyndham's baronetcy) — for the benefit of the invalid. She would have done any thing, in short, for the daughter of her old neighbour Lady Maria, and of her late esteemed friend Sir Charles, excepting bestow a nuptial benediction upon her

union with Lord Stapylford. "Montague was really such a *very* fine young man, and still so young, that he had every hope of retrieving his fortunes by a prudent marriage; and to have him throw himself away upon a pretty girl without a shilling, was a sacrifice she could not conscientiously bring herself to sanction."

Although these prudential ancestry-maternal annotations were of course withheld from the ears of their object, yet Minnie failed not to retain an irrepressible prejudice against the too provident grandame of her dear Stapylford. Consigning the quinine to the family medicine-chest, and the Malaga to the family butler, she contrived to linger in her own apartment whenever the Monteagle liveries were seen progressing along the avenue;—yes! even when the good ship the Owen Glendower had been announced, in the SHIP NEWS of the *Times*, as having reached Madeira; and when, by a descent into the drawing-room, she might possibly have been blest by extracts from her beloved Montague's despatches to his benefactress, in addition to the "curtailed abbreviation" of a letter wherein he had simultaneously announced his safety to her fair self.

Now this cursory epistle had materially aggravated the sentimental sorrows of the sufferer!—Lord Stapylford, in becoming sea-sick, had fancied himself heart-sick, and like other voyagers, whose souls grow tenderly reminiscent under the pressing miseries of marine fare and cabin confinement, had put forth the usual fustian common-places of "dragging at each remove a lengthening chain"—of "Crotona's sage—and the moon—and the unhappy exile longing to trace her image there." And Minnie, who was extremely unpractised in novel reading and sonnet writing—who was in the first blush of an amatory correspondence, and who consequently regarded her Montague's effusion as the quintessential sublime and beautiful of erotic literature—had rendered justice to his eloquence by weeping the sheet of Bath hot-pressed into a condition worthy the drying lines of her uncle's laundry-ground!

Next among the dissentients, that uncle himself, perhaps, ought to claim precedency. But while Lady Monteagle founded *her* feelings of compassion toward's Minnie's loss

on the perfections and personal importance of her grandson, Sir Joseph Willingham felt himself considerably aggrieved by Lord Stapylford's abrupt departure, under a profound sense of the "perfection and personal importance" of *his* own and only son. Minnie looked so lovely in her despondency, and was now so nearly (in *his* opinion) disfranchised from her former engagement, that he began to entertain considerable alarm lest his heir-apparent should fall in love with her; and, according to the dowager's especial phrase, "throw himself away on a pretty girl without a shilling." It was this very contingency which had induced him, ten years before, to overlook the growing partiality of his niece for Charles's scape-grace schoolfellow, and four years before to sanction their betrothment; without which amulet of defence against her charms, nothing would have persuaded him to submit to the perilous vicinity of so dangerous an inmate as his brother's lovely daughter. But now—all his precautions appeared to have been taken in vain—all his foresight wasted. *There* was Minnie—and *there* was Charles;—and left almost "to their own heart's most sweet society!"—Mary was so regardless of her own and her brother's interest, that she remained as much engrossed by her books, and her music, and her conservatory, as before the *tête-à-têtes* of her companions had acquired their recent peril. Yes! Sir Joseph clearly foresaw it all!—Lord Stapylford would be lost in doubling the Cape of Good Hope, or in the tail of a Typhoon, and Charles Willingham, the heir of Heddeston Court and all its dependencies, would disgrace himself by marrying a beggar!

It would have been vain to suggest to so sordid a man, that those very dependencies might reasonably afford the freedom of matrimonial election to his son; but it might have been observed to him with equal truth, and far more effect, that the novel relative position of the parties, so far from increasing their mutual partiality, had confirmed their total alienation from each other. Minnie had never allowed herself to forgive her cousin's invectives against her ruined and absent lover; and Charles Willingham, who was becoming more studious than ever under the excitement of

literary commendation and public notice, now devoted himself wholly to his political pursuits, and seemed expressly to avoid the puerile claims of his two fair companions; unless when his presence was actually needed as their protection through the dangers of solitude, or the decencies of society. All confidence between the cousins was at an end; and Charles appeared to despise, and Minnie to defy, the enmity they had mutually provoked. Sir Joseph, with half a grain of understanding, might have perceived that there had been as little of smoothness in the course of his niece's friendship as in that of her true love; and that the misunderstanding between her and his son was becoming gradually confirmed into a settled dislike.

The third person — to proceed methodically — who shared not in the exultation of Minnie's friends on occasion of her lover's departure — was her uncle, General de Vesci. From first to last he had been destined to nothing but disappointments in his views and projects for the advancement of his niece's family. He really loved the Willinghams; — for, saving his narcotic wife, they were all he had to love! — He had intended Claudia to be a duchess — he had expected Eleanor to become Lady Wyndham; and he had seriously purposed to grace the double hymeneals with a gift of bank securities to a considerable amount; and — to use the phrase of the fairy-tale book — with "a bag of pearls as big as hazel nuts!" — Both had disappointed him! — and he had been so unpityingly twitted with this double disappointment by the multitudinous clan of Westland, and so unintentionally galled by the constant recurrence of poor Mrs. de Vesci to the subject, (who was apt to dream after dinner that the marriages had been really perpetrated, and that Claudia was to all intents and purposes her grace of Lisborough,) that his patience was altogether exhausted; and but for the departure of the Willinghams under the fashionable and redeeming convoy of Lady Robert Lorton, he would have run some risk of hating them for the remainder of their days.

As it was, he felt himself not a little indignant at being abandoned by Lady Maria to the society of his somniferous spouse; but, as he had too much pride to acknowledge his

displeasure on that score, or his consciousness that his own generosity had furnished them with the means of flight, he chose to make poor little Minnie's desertion the overt theme of his animadversions. "The girl was exceedingly ill used!—Her education, indeed!—why was *her* education to differ from that which had been bestowed on her sisters?—It was true that the foreign system had proved, in *their* case, but little to the purpose; but that was a fact of which Lady Maria, at least, appeared but slightly aware. And then to leave dear Minnie under the protection of those canting, humdrum, methodistical people at Heddeston Court! when Mrs. de Vesci and himself would have had so much gratification in receiving her!—It was really too unfeeling!"

On this hint he not only spake, but in the warmth of a yearning heart indited an epistle to his niece; in reply to which, Lady Maria Willingham attempted to pacify her uncle by a confidential acknowledgment of Minnie's secret engagements with Lord Stapylford; and by an appeal to his feelings in favour of the eligible proximities between Heddeston and Monteagle Park.

In a moment, the general's fury was propitiated!—"Half a loaf," quoth Sancho, "is better than no bread;"—a Lady Stapylford was better than no duchess!—From that hour he waited patiently for the accomplishment of Minnie's seventeenth year, and of her young lord's majority, to bestow upon them the bag of pearls and the bank stock predestined to her elder sisters. But in the midst of his joyous anticipations, and his malicious hopes of punishing his nieces for the prolongation of their residence on the Continent, the intelligence of Lord Stapylford's ruin burst upon him like a thunder-cloud; and before he could look about him and form some suggestion for the renewal of his favourite scheme, he was destined to the aggravated insult of learning that Lord Stapylford had sailed as a cornet and an aide-de-camp for India; and that his darling niece was weeping out her blue eyes at Heddeston Court!

What he said in his wrath is more than it would be decorous to repeat!—what he *did* was better to the purpose, and more to his credit. He addressed a most affec-

tionate invitation to Minnie, imploring her to make his house her home; and accusing the mismanagement of the Willingham family as the origin of the failure of her prospects. He even hinted that, had he been consulted, he might have superseded the necessity for Lord Stapylford's embracing a professional life; and acknowledged such kind intentions towards her, both for the present and the future, that Minnie, finding Sir Joseph growing crosser and crosser through the summer, and Charles still more and more morose, applied to Lady Maria for permission to pay a long vist to the De Vescis. Her mother, indeed, desired no better. The Stapylford connection having evaporated — for she was indignant on discovering that her much injured daughter continued to regard her engagement as binding, and determined to interpose her maternal authority against its continuance — she saw no further advantage to be derived from her residence at Heddeston; and greatly preferred that Minnie should become a hostage for the interests of her family, in the general's household and heart.

And thus Minnie Willingham became domesticated with her uncle and aunt De Vesci, at Bensleigh Park; and acquired, in a change of air and scene, some temporary accession of cheerfulness. — But it would not do! — she was an altered creature! — Her animated spirits had passed away: her buoyant beauty had subsided into an air of meek and pensive loveliness; and not even the spiteful Westlands, when they pointed out the change to her uncle, could permit themselves to exult in the result. The general was frantic with vexation and alarm; and after venting his indignation by a profusion of ugly words applied to the modern youth of the British peerage, he resolved on consulting a synod of fashionable physicians concerning the efficacy of change of climate in the case of "Miss Maria Willingham."

The "case" was *stated* to be one of galloping consumption; and a winter at Naples was accordingly sanctioned as peculiarly desirable; while being in truth one of mere sentimental despondency, the journey could do no harm; and afforded the certainty of variety and mental excitement.

Lady Maria and her daughters were already settled there for the season; and within a few weeks the De Vescis and Willinghams became co-residents in the Palazzo Manfredoni in the Strada di Toledo. It was many more, however, before poor slumberous Mrs. de Vesci could rouse herself to comprehend that she had really arrived in Italy, and was living within sight of a volcano. She was more than once heard to enquire "how long the Wrekin had taken to smoking?"

CHAPTER XI.

Oh! thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate,
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate;
Sudden these honours shall be snatched away,
And cursed for ever this victorious day.

Rape of the Lock.

THREE years had passed since Minnie and her sisters had parted; and now they met as *women*, sharing the same pleasures, the same views, and the same ambitions. "Little Minnie" had become "Miss Maria;" and although her exquisite loveliness of feature and surpassing grace of gesture were such as to throw their own pretensions into the shade, even in their brightest days—and more than sufficient to eclipse them altogether, now that they were fading into the sere and yellow leaf of tarnished youth—yet Minnie's disposition was so gentle, her *naïveté* so captivating, and her present subdued state of mind so "soothing sweet," that it would have been impossible to cherish one jealous or unkind feeling against her.

Claudia was more especially moved in her favour—for she, too, "had loved much!" and even Eleanor, who could fancy no deeper cause for sorrow than the blight of a matrimonial disappointment, and the wretched sense of having been defrauded of "a home of one's own," could warmly sympathise in her present feelings. When they saw, too, how patiently she disposed herself to endure Lady Maria's caprices and flights of injustice; how honourably she exerted herself in their cause to procure

indulgences, and *fêtes*, and generosities for *them*, similar to those lavished on herself by General de Vesci;—and, above all, when they found her guiltless of all intention to interfere with their own flirtations, or molest their own speculations, they very cordially admitted her to a lawful share of their sisterly affection. They could not, indeed, persuade her to call mamma "a bore" so often as they wished, or succeed for a single moment in inducing her to speak or think unkindly of the inmates of Heddeston; and they might possibly have ended by voting her character too tame, too enduring, too patient of evil, had they not incidentally chanced upon the name of old Lady Monteagle. At the bare mention of the Kentish dowager, Minnie's indignation blazed forth! But even on this subject the sisters were not destined to a cordial unison of feeling; for Claudia and Eleanor remembered her only as a tiresome, parading, absurd old woman — as an object for mimicry, and subject for caricature; while their sister, smarting under her persecutions, regarded Lady Monteagle's errors as any thing but a laughing matter.

Meanwhile, they readily welcomed her to their confidence on all points, saving those little matrimonial projects on which they had been so long in the habit of restricting their plots to each other's bosoms. On these subjects, too, Minnie herself would have been found wanting both in intelligence and sympathy. She had not outlived the age of disinterested love; nor been nurtured in a land where its impulses are alternately reprobated as insane and indelicate. She regarded her sisters as too handsome, and too prosperous, and too agreeable to be in need of any superfluous manœuvring in order to secure themselves the certainty of a popular partner, and the prospect of an eligible connection. That they were still unmarried she concluded to be, as in her cousin Mary's case, the mere consequence of their own fastidious indifference;—she knew nothing at present of the tempting influence of Mary's fifty thousand pounds — of their own oft-defeated schemes — or of the large majority of young ladies, both pretty, and witty, and fashionable, who are destined to wait in vain for the "kindred soul" born to a participation of their matrimo-

nial horoscope. Her sisters were occasionally betrayed into hazarding general principles of action in her presence, which were amazing and incomprehensible to her mind; and into the utterance of certain odious expressions, such as "making a *set* at Lord ——" — "trying to *catch* Sir Thomas B." — "setting your cap at a good match" — and "cutting a younger brother — a scorpion — or a detrimental" — which were at once as mysterious and as offensive in her ears as an oration in "Thieves' Latin" could possibly prove to the most sensitive and double-refined exclusive of the Travellers' Club! On such occasions, Minnie was apt to revert with tender regret to the modest elegance, the chaste purity of cousin Mary's discourse; to her feminine tranquillity of air, and patient kindliness of audience. But then Mary had marred all her perfections by allowing herself to speak so unhandsomely, so disparagingly of her poor Stapylford! — and then her sisters had such a consolatory torrent of angry vituperation to bestow upon that odious old Lady Monteagle!

In the mean time, the winter ebbed imperceptibly and not unpleasantly away. Minnie's impaired health and dispirited heart became gradually restored under the powerful renovation of youthful impulses. The land "where the citron and olive are fairest of fruit" was new to her enjoyment; — the "sweet south" poured its balmy influence upon her bosom, and the "deep blue seas" spread their tideless margin before her bluer eyes, unshorn of the mighty charm of novelty. While Claudia and Eleanor rushed to their balls and maskings, their operas and drives on the Chiaja, Minnie devoted her quiet evenings to the domestic dulness of the De Vescis; and her happy mornings to the exploratory drives and rides sanctioned, even in winter, by the genial mildness of the climate; and when, by some benign and especial interposition of Providence and the Foreign Office, a new Neapolitan Secretary of Legation was appointed and gazetted, and — on arriving from Turin — proved to be the identical Mr. Lorimer, her demi-semi cousin, so warmly regarded by her friends the Willinghams of Heddeston Court — she had nothing left to desire!

With this same remote kinsman, and proximate friend, her sister Eleanor's name had never chanced to be connected in her ears. She had, in fact, been engrossed with her sampler and French grammar, at the period of his former intimacy with her family; and vaguely remembering that Lord Stapylford had once alluded to an attachment, or a flirtation, between her second sister and "his *poor* friend Lorimer," she concluded that the hero thus tenderly designated had been the eldest son of Lord Lorimer — a sucking politician of some eminence in his brief day — who had died three years before of a quinsey caught in the æolian lobby of the House of Commons, after a five hours' speech against an amendment on a road bill. She therefore saw the gentle Frederick arrive, without the least suspicion of any embarrassment which his presence might occasion to the rest of the party; and knowing him to have been the schoolfellow and boyish companion of her dear Montague, she felt all that inexplicable gratification in his society which we are apt to experience on encountering the beloved of those we love. "I am not the rose!" says the perfumed earth of the Persian fable, "but cherish me! — for we have dwelt together."

Minnie Willingham, by the delight she took in Mr. Lorimer's company, certainly pursued the precept. She would detain him for hours, in General de Vesci's vast and comfortless saloon; boasting to him of Mary Willingham's perfections, and enquiring of him concerning Charles's early acquirements. Her curiosity respecting Eton and Oxford really appeared insatiable. But while she talked of her cousin, she probably thought only of her lover; and in the course of her cross-examination respecting Mr. Willingham's dogs and horses, private tutors and mathematics, she was sure to elicit something *en passant* touching "Stapyl ford's pranks" — or "Stapylford's foolish extravagance."

Blest age! — when to hear "the one loved name" uttered even in a similar connection with words of opprobrium and condemnation, we provoke a thousand tedious details, and brave whole volumes of common-place; — blest age! — when our thrilling hearts and conscious ears shrink from the very sound we have thus laboriously sought: — why — why

should thy poetical intensity ever become diffused into the absorbing prose of ordinary existence!

But while Lady Maria was intent upon her professional chaperonship of the two elder daughters whom she had now desperately determined to "get off her hands" to the highest and readiest bidder, General de Vesci considered it incumbent upon himself to bend his vigilant paternal, or grand-paternal, observation upon the growing intimacy between his own fair charge and the young secretary of legation; but by no means with the design of prohibitory interference. He entertained, indeed, a very partial prejudice in favour of Frederick; who, from a generous, thoughtless, clever boy, had become polished, by a diplomatic course of half the courts in Europe, into an intelligent, highly-bred, and agreeable young man;—he had not only attained, by the decease of his elder brother, an honourable heirship to the aristocratic glories of the noble house of Lorimer; but those very glories had been recently enhanced by his father's admission to the cabinet, and by all the consequent distinctions of ministerial patronage. Poor Lord Lorimer, after having occupied a corner of the state lumber-room for forty years, as an obsolete and unavailable piece of furniture, had been recently dragged forth to be garnished with crimson velvet, and furbished up with refulgent brass nails!—and he was now the president of a board—was talked of at all the Saturday dinner-tables as "a very able man;" and proved himself, in truth, as useful a log to stand up in the House as a butt for Mr. Hume's random shots, as any other wooden president recorded in the Red Book.

Both as a lord, and as a plausible log, General de Vesci had ever entertained a sincere respect for him; and as he now received at the hands of his son the secretary a far greater portion of deference and regard than the dandies and idlers—the *bon partis* and *mauvais sujets*—attached to Claudia and Eleanor's train, found it worth their while to pay to an ex-governor, with a pig-tail, an indifferent coat, and a singular predilection in favour of his own prose—he soon began to concoct a secret scheme for Mr. Lorimer's union with his favourite niece. A placeman—let

his place be ever so insignificant—fails not to maintain a sort of official dignity in the eyes of a man who has himself eaten the bread of government;—there exists a degree of animal magnetism in such words as "duties"—"services"—"despatches"—"pension"—irresistibly binding to their sympathies!—By a marriage with Lord Lorimer's son, Minnie might perhaps live to be an ambassadress!—and with that contingency, the certainty of her becoming a viscountess appeared wholly unworthy of comparison, in General de Vesci's estimation.

Having thus explained the motives which severally induced Miss Willingham and her uncle to extend their hands so much more cordially in favour of Mr. Lorimer's reception, than in that of any other *attaché* to the British or any other mission; or of any duca, marchese, or barone frequenting or indigenous in the court of the Two Sicilies; it appears necessary to assign some reason for Frederick's eager acceptance of their hospitality, and for the ceaseless assiduity which detained him day after day within auditory endurance of the General's verbal, and Mrs. de Vesci's nasal, see-saw.

Lady Maria herself was far from cold in her hospitality towards her young cousin; yet he entered the brilliant and intoxicating scene of her crowded apartments as reluctantly, and returned to them as sparingly, as possible. Eleanor had made it her policy to greet him as if the events of the past had totally escaped her memory; and Lorimer had become too much a man of the world to allow the slightest vestige of angry reminiscence to imbitter his demeanour towards her. He was ready to laugh, talk, dance, and even flirt, with either of his handsome and popular cousins; and Lady Maria almost flattered herself that the "elegant and distinguished Mr. Lorimer" might in time be tempted to renew the overtures hazarded by "the forward and presuming Mr. Frederick;" and as to the increasing frequency of his visits at the *casa* De Vesci—was he not by vocation a diplomat?—and had he not a right to strengthen his interest in a quarter so influential, and so connected with the future prosperity of the Willinghams, as their opulent and heirless uncle?

The Carnival was now at hand!—and "varnished faces" began to shed their mummery over the surface of the land. *Bals costumés* were projected by the various embassies; and the several representatives of European sovereignty appeared to acknowledge no prouder rivalship—no interests more powerfully conflicting—than the extent of their orchestras—the intensity of their festal illuminations—the varieties of their iced sherbet—and the exotic *recherche* of their buffet of wines.

Claudia and Eleanor, for the twentieth time in their lives, were frenzied with the excitements of the delicious passing hour. Every *fête* in succession was predicted to surpass its predecessor; every new disguise was anticipated as offering the acme of perfection, both in regard to elegance of costume and to the display of their own beauties. Claudia who, as the representative of Francesca di Rimini at the ball of the Russian ambassador, had expected the final subjugation of a noble young Finland bear—a Prince Astrapouschapouvitsh possessing three million wersts of territory somewhere between Astrachan and the North Pole, and a sufficient provision of malachite in his copper-mines to encrust the stabling for his stud of 365 thorough-bred Arabians—was satisfied to transform herself into Anne Boleyn on the following evening, with the view of captivating a slender willow-slip of an English marquis;—who looked as lank and insane as an ill-dressed *plat* of *Tendrons de veau!* While Eleanor alternately smiled as "Aline, Reine de Golconde," upon the French ambassador—a widowed *roué* with grey hair, a fund of piquant anecdotes, *un nom historique*, and the worst reputation in Europe—and bestowed her endurance upon a lump of plebeian gold, as heavy as lead, in the person of a certain Sir Richard Westland (Richard the son of Hew)—who had been posted off to Italy by the united anxieties of that speculative dynasty, in order to look after General de Vesci and his property; and who, in his own proper person, had encountered the emery and pumice-stone and varnish of Eton, Oxford, and a dragoon regiment—without polishing down the air, idiom and, parsimonious pro-

pensities he had originally acquired during his babyhood in the arithmetical purlieus of Finsbury Square.

The great trial, however — the mighty hour of projection — was reserved by the efforts of both sisters, for a certain Thursday, preceding the important "fat Tuesday," which consecrates the temporary insanity of papistical Europe; and secures the crispness of unnumbered fritters upon the identical embers destined to grace the penitence of the following day. The De Vescis had issued cards for a *bal masqué* on that evening. The court and the city had engaged itself to grace the *fête;* and the Willinghams — ay! even the little Cenerentola herself — were vehement that it should prove the most effective entertainment of the Carnival. Indeed there appeared every prospect of a triumph; for what are the resources of peer or prince of Calabria or Romagna — what the revenues of ambassador or cardinal — compared with those of a ready-money nabob, with a government pension and a substantial letter of credit upon his private banker? — The suite of half-furnished apartments in their gigantesque Manfredoni palace was accordingly prepared with the most lavish and sumptuous profusion; General and Mrs. de Vesci vacated their own particular chambers to make way for banquet and for ball; and throughout their establishment a most complete disorganisation in the animate and inanimate departments, put forth the anticipative shadow of a coming *fête!* — "Never mind — never mind!" replied the good-natured general to every complaint of broken shins, and property mislaid, and draughts of air admitted, and draughts for cash disbursed. "Never mind the temporary confusion; — after Thursday, every thing will be straight again!"

Short-sighted mortals that we are! — that very Thursday sealed his earthly destiny! — The proverb says, "*Vedi Napoli, e poi mori!*" — and General de Vesci fulfilled its injunction to the very letter. In the hurry and exposure consequent upon the dismemberment of his mansion, he caught a severe cold; and as the physician to the embassy, as well as the physicians and surgeons of his majesty of the Two Sicilies, were far too much engrossed by the infatuations of the Carnival to perceive that the inflammation

had fallen upon his windpipe, he was permitted to die as rapidly, and with as little molestation, as he pleased. Minnie alone, from the first moment of his attack, had become seriously alarmed for his safety; and although she could by no means persuade her sisters to refrain from the balls to which they had previously engaged themselves, she succeeded in prevailing upon Mr. Lorimer to share her vigils by the side of what she truly conjectured to be her kind old uncle's bed of death! Before daylight on the eventful Thursday which was to have filled his hotel with the idle tumults of music and festivity — with the importunate breath of the vanity of vanities — *he* too had become aware of his precarious condition; and immediately proceeded to prepare himself for the worst result with the humility of a Christian, and the firmness of a man and a soldier. He desired to be left alone with his wife, Mr. Lorimer, and the chaplain to the embassy; and before the hour of their confidential interview had expired, Lady Maria and her daughters — returning in all their tissued trappings from the *fête* of the Sardinian minister — were informed that General de Vesci, who had been moved to a suite of apartments adjoining their own, was already in the extremities of death.

In rushed Lady Maria! — enrobed in her gaudy apparel; concealing with an embroidered handkerchief two anxious eyes all-guiltless of a tear. In rushed Claudia and Eleanor! — horror-struck and amazed — but in reality little touched in the chord of true feminine mercy. A black valet-de-chambre, who had followed his master from the sunny regions of another hemisphere, stood sobbing beside the door of the anteroom; and to *him* Lady Maria addressed her first explosion of tender agony.

"Oh, Sambree! — the poor dear general! — Who could have thought it would end thus? — the very day of the ball — the day we have been all anticipating! — Sambree, do you really think there is no hope? — Where is poor Mrs. de Vesci? — Has every thing been done? (then in a lower voice) — Has any one received the general's last wishes, Sambree? — Has any one enquired about THE WILL?"

Poor Sambree with unintelligible incoherence asserted

that "his mistress had never left the general's chamber, but that she appeared almost insensible to the scene passing before her eyes; and that his poor dear massa was praying for God Almighty's mercy, with good Mr. Lorimer and good parson Sheldon."

Lady Maria regarded this latter piece of information as very little to the purpose. "He is surrounded by such a set of sentimental inconsiderate people," whispered she in French to her daughters, "that I am persuaded they will let him slip out of the world without so much as enquiring into his testamentary dispositions! Let us send for Richard Westland."

"Madness — mamma, madness! — that would destroy our last chance."

"It is dreadful to think of ten thousand a-year passing out of the family for want of a little presence of mind. What a terrible crisis!"

"Hush! here is Mr. Lorimer!"

"Oh, my dear Mr. Lorimer! what an afflicting event! — we are quite distracted! — is there no hope? — has every thing been done?"

"Every thing — and, alas! in vain! — the physicians have just acknowledged that General de Vesci has not half an hour to live!"

"What do I hear?"

"He is still sensible; — perhaps you would wish to see him?"

"I shall make it my duty to overcome my feelings for the effort. There *are* duties, my dear Mr. Lorimer, which should not be overlooked — no! not even at the instigation of false delicacy; — may I therefore enquire whether any one has had the precaution to ascertain the poor dear general's last wishes? — I speak, of course, solely on my poor dear aunt's account; — for Mrs. de Vesci is a helpless creature, and her interests should not be neglected!"

"Be satisfied, madam; General de Vesci's will is already under the custody of the British ambassador."

With this weight of apprehension removed from her mind, Lady Maria Willingham kindly permitted her uncle to die in peace! She reserved all her fussy and vociferous

distress for the survivors; and felt herself called upon to bestow upon the ceremony of his interment all the officious and pompous zeal she had reserved for his *bal costumé*. It was wonderful how much she found to say, touching the dreadful shock which her feelings had received; and how much to insinuate respecting the insensibility of the widow; who, from the actual moment of the general's decease, had scarcely betrayed a token of lifelike consciousness, saving by a vague and terrible smile whenever her health was enquired after, or her opinion referred to. Even her sapient nephew, Sir Richard Westland, acknowledged that it was extraordinary and disgusting to see a person thus stupidly callous at such a moment!

A still greater shock, however, awaited the feelings of Lady Maria than the general's death; and a still greater loss had already befallen Claudia and Eleanor than that of the *bal costumé*. The seals of the will having been officially opened, his property, real and personal, (including Bensleigh Park—the mansion in Portman Square—the service of plate, and the bag of pearls,) was found to be bequeathed—with a reserved life-interest to his beloved wife—to "Maria, youngest daughter of the late Sir Charles Willingham, bart.!" the Hon. Frederick Lorimer and Sir Richard Westland, of Lombard Street, being appointed executors thereof; and a provisionary clause being inserted, "that in case of the marriage of the said Maria Willingham with Montague Lord Stapylford, a forfeiture of eighty thousand pounds sterling should be deducted from the amount of the said personalty, to be divided in equal shares between Sir Thomas Westland, bart., Sir Richard, Sir John, and Sir Robert!"

It required all the restraining influence of the presence of his excellency the ambassador, and of the two executors, to repress poor Lady Maria's indignation, on the official lecture of this extraordinary and abominable document! Her very name omitted—her daughter rendered independent of her maternal authority—even the Westlands contingently preferred before herself! She doubted not that it was all Mr. Lorimer's doing!—all the result of a cabal between Minnie and himself!—they had doubtless

beset the poor general's dying bed, and softened his heart with their crocodile tears! And the worst of her grievances was the impossibility of venting her fury upon her daughter; for the will was undeniably valid—and the immediate heiress to a property of between ten and fifteen thousand a year was no longer a person to be ill used. Even his excellency Lord * * * * had already begun to treat her with appropriate deference; and Lady Maria predicted that the next family event likely to require his official interference and announcement would be the union of the fair lady of Bensleigh Park with his crafty secretary of legation!

In this, however, her ladyship was mistaken. Another family event was destined to intervene; and one of a nature equally unexpected with the last. Within three weeks after the general's melancholy end, Mrs. de Vesci was found dead in her chair;—the callous, insensible widow had perished in the silent agony of a broken heart! From the moment of her husband's death she had expressed neither sorrow nor suffering—no! not even to Minnie, whom she loved—and who had been unceasingly attentive in administering to her wants. She had not wept, or complained, or seemed to mourn; but the one kind hand which for fifty years had sustained her monotonous existence had been torn away. She missed the accustomed tread—the familiar voice—the habitual enquiry—even the daily reproof bespeaking the intimacy of wedded love. She felt that the chain was broken—that her pilgrimage was ended—that it were a fruitless labour to bind herself to a newer and younger generation; and the interposing mercy of a heavenly hand soon terminated the struggle of her lonely heart, by laying her at rest beside the partner of her long and uneventful life, in the cemetery of the Campo Santo.

Now had poor Mrs. de Vesci been thirty years younger, her death would have been regarded as a very pathetic event, and a mighty triumph of conjugal attachment; but as she chanced to be fat, and fifty-five, and an object of interest to no mortal breathing, the English coteries of Naples prosaically decided that she died of a fit;—that it was a very fortunate release for herself, and an additional piece of good fortune for the lovely little heiress. Her

nephew alone was of opinion that she might better have reconciled herself anew to life; for he had eagerly anticipated full ten years of dowager-savings from the superfluities of the Bensleigh estate, to be divided among the Westland clan; whose sole prospects of advantage from the property were now derived from the probability of Minnie's future marriage with Lord Stapylford. Had it not been for his inferences to that effect, the thrifty Sir Richard would certainly have made an attempt in his own favour; as it was, he could find no better motive for consolation during the fruitless journey of his return to England, than that the simultaneous deaths of his uncle and aunt had only necessitated the outlay for a single suit of mourning.

The feelings and projects entertained by Lady Maria and her three daughters during a similar progress between Naples and Calais may be briefly gathered from the following letter; which was expedited by Frederick Lorimer to his friend, Charles Willingham, through the sacred medium of the ambassador's bag: —

"*Napoli, Albergo del Sole, March* 31. 1830.

"I have just parted with my ward, who leaves Naples at daybreak. Surely there never was any thing more singular than that I should find myself, at twenty-five, guardian to a rich and lovely heiress! — that *I*, to whom the very name of Willingham was for so many years the rallying-point of every soft emotion, should become intrusted with the destinies of its loveliest representative! It was from your letters, my dear Charles, that I first learned to know Minnie; that I first heard of her pure ingenuousness of mind, of her elegance of gesture, and still more refined elegance of character. While she was still an inmate in your father's house, how unceasingly were you pleased to recite to me the catalogue of her perfections; and to lament over the fatal perversity which appeared likely to consign them to the arms of a selfish libertine, such as Stapylford! — I then thought you infatuated; and that, engrossed as you were by the interest of your public pursuits, you probably bowed your idolatry to the only female figure extant among your household divinities, for want of leiures

and activity to extend your search among the scattered goddesses of the sex.

" I am now enabled to beg Minnie's pardon and yours for the sacrilege of such an opinion! So far from considering you prone to exaggerate the excellencies and fascinations of her character, I feel that you do not render them half the justice they deserve; — that you do not estimate, within thousands of degrees, the delicacy of mind, the diffident sweetness, distinguishing her above all other women. I send her to you, embellished in person — strengthened in health; and if not improved in mental or moral attributes, it is because amendment on those points are indeed difficult. So far from being elated by the greatness which has been unexpectedly thrust upon her, I find her dispirited and intimidated by the necessity for action which it involves. Her position is one of the most critical delicacy; yet I am persuaded she will extricate herself from its multiform dilemma with all the dignity and amiable feeling characterising her disposition. I shall anxiously maintain a confidential correspondence with my ward; and in the course of the autumn I trust my father's interest will procure me a remission of my official duties here, that I may run over to England, and take a more active part in the arrangement of her affairs. In the interim, I pray of you, my dear friend, to watch diligently over her welfare and happiness. Do not satisfy yourself with the surface of things; or your reports will be far from satisfactory to myself. *You know* Lady Maria! Let me implore you not to suffer her to trifle with Minnie's destinies, as she has done with those of her elder daughters!

" In the hands of Sir Richard Westland and his family, the care of Miss Willingham's splendid fortune is perhaps more securely placed than in my own; and it was my representations to this effect which induced General de Vesci, on his deathbed, to appoint him my coadjutor in the trusteeship. But I feel that persons of the mercenary Westland stamp are incapable of obtaining her confidence, or of protecting her better interests. Her personal happiness is a deposit which I consider to be my own peculiar charge;

and as her cousin—as the companion of her childhood —*and as my friend*—I call upon *you*, Charles, to assist me in the faithful discharge of so sacred a trust! If Minnie's future existence should become imbittered by any sorrow in my power to avert, I should feel myself cruelly responsible for —— but *basta!* I am getting too solemn—too much of the guardian!—and you will probably scorn my premature assumption of office! *Changeons de ton!*

"I am persuaded it will divert you to observe with what subtle celerity Lady Maria has transferred her anxious affections to the youngling of her flock! and how she is already beginning to reprobate the lovely Claudia as a fright, and the witty Eleanor as a dunce! Certes both the one and the other have grievously disappointed the matrimonial speculations which she amused herself with forming in their behalf on her first arrival at Naples. Nay, she was even so obliging as to include my unworthy self among the objects of her efforts; and to imagine that my first boyish passion for her sprightly coquette, Nelly, was likely to be renewed after my experience among her Parisian prototypes!—I am really sorry both for them and for her; and the more so that her indelicate attempts upon every *bon parti* falling in her way tend at once to depreciate and dishonour, and grieve one member of the family, who is deserving of a far better parentage.

"I have already written to my mother—the most deserving and admirable of women—to exert her best endeavours in favour of my gentle ward; and I beg you will intercede with your charming sister, if any intercession on my part be needful to that effect, to counteract the influence of Lady Maria, and to maintain our dear Minnie in her present views of disinterested rectitude, and steadfast purity of principle.—Farewell, my dear Charles, until we meet again. "F. Lorimer."

The opinion formed by Charles Willingham, on the perusal of this fervent epistle, exactly coincided with that already devised by the crafty Lady Maria, and with that which we preconjecture to have been formed by our readers in general,—namely, that the youthful guardian and his

ward were already engaged by the sacred bonds of mutual affection; and that Sir Thomas, Sir Richard, Sir Robert, and Sir John, had already lost all chance of the eighty thousand pounds sterling, claimable upon the marriage of Miss Willingham with Lord Stapylford!

Nor did Mr. Willingham feel himself bound to maintain the scrupulous proprietorship of his opinion on this interesting topic. With skilful but unwitting barbarity, he confided both the letter and his inferences to his sister; thus destroying at once the visionary chimera of hope, which patient years and untirable affection had nourished within her bosom. And both Charles and Mary, on paying their first visit of condolence and congratulation in Portman Square, and their tribute of unqualified admiration to the resplendent loveliness and refined elegance of their darling Minnie, were persuaded that they were saluting, in the graceful heiress of Bensleigh, the future bride of the future Lord Lorimer! It may be imagined that both cousins were equally impatient to develope the mystery.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

VOLUME THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

Hear the pretty ladies talk —
Tittle tattle — tittle tattle! —
Like their pattens when they walk,
Pittle pattle — pittle pattle! DR. DARWIN.

IN pursuance with the will of General de Vesci, the establishment of the young heiress, both at Bensleigh and in Portman Square, was maintained on the same footing his own had formerly occupied; and in pursuance with her own she was for some time permitted to mark her respect towards his memory, by refraining from those scenes of folly and dissipation in which her mother and her sisters were but too eager to renew their labour of pleasure. Until the attainment of her majority, a liberal allowance had been assigned her by the providence of her kind uncle. It was settled and defined, indeed, beyond the interference even of her guardians; and the first deed of her independence was to secure a large portion of this to Lady Maria and her daughters; as an evidence of gratitude, she said, for their kindness in consenting to become her inmates.

By this liberality of conduct she succeeded in reconciling them, as much as possible, to the circumstances which had so materially and so unexpectedly elevated her fortunes above their own; and next to finding themselves in their own persons the heiresses of Bensleigh, they were satisfied to be pointed out as sisters to "the rich Miss de Vesci;" a change of designation to which Minnie had been compelled by the testamentary injunctions of her uncle. Excepting indeed that her equipages and opera-box were hired and purchased in her name, they were more at the service of Claudia and Eleanor than at her own.

Meanwhile Lady Maria, who saw that it was equally her personal interest to get rid of her eldest daughters by matrimony, and to hug her youngest to her heart in single blessedness, disposed herself for the eager prosecution of this twofold measure. Like a skilful general, she addressed herself in the first instance to the numeration and disposition of her forces; calculating with callous selfishness those deductions of "killed and wounded" which Time—the general enemy—had gradually made in the sum-total of her London acquaintance. Her ladyship had now perambulated the thorny ways of the world for more than fifty years; and had reason to boast herself of one of

The wisest fools much time has ever made!

It was amazing the store of poisoned honey she had managed to hive within the cells of her worldly brain; it was astonishing the quantity of shreds and patches of plausible sophistry with which she had contrived to envelope the paltry selfishness of her disposition. She made it appear to the whole world that she had sacrificed herself, in disinterested martyrdom, in order to secure General de Vesci's fortune to one of her three beloved children; and while she carefully hoarded her jointure with a view to future dowager contingencies, she seemed solely bent upon guarding the interests of her daughter, to the total neglect of her own views and feelings. On returning to England in all the mediocrity of her former position, she had affected an air of haughty finery, in order to blind the observation of society; but as the mother of Miss de Vesci, and the virtual mistress of a magnificent establishment, she immediately adopted an ingratiating tone of humble simplicity, equally artificial, and consequently equally offensive to good taste and good feeling.

Unfortunately Lady Maria's temper and health had not improved with her social tactics. A long life of late hours and dissipated habits had tended to enfeeble and sour both the one and the other; and she was only the more inclined to quarrel with the necessity which protracted her duties as chaperon far beyond the utmost limit

of patience she had anticipated. On the Continent, thanks to early hours and the easy time adopted in the modes of general reception, the labours of such a vocation are charmingly mitigated; but on returning to the stately and formidable gaieties of a London season, her ladyship began to reflect with peevish dismay upon those rheumatic symptoms, and bilious headaches, and nervous attacks, which already began to emulate the valetudinarian destinies of her mother, poor old Lady de Vesci. Under these circumstances she could neither pass the gates of Lisborough House, nor the equipage of Lady Wyndham, without an internal commotion of fury against her own unmarried daughters!

Of their successful rivals in both these quarters, Claudia and Eleanor, during their long residence on the Continent, had been unable to gather any very explicit intelligence. They had learned, from the letters of their cousin Mary Willingham, that Sir William Wyndham, the solid and stolid member for the county of Kent, had consoled himself for his numerous disappointments immediately after their departure from Spa, by a precipitate union with little, silly, giggling, flirting, Emily Lorimer! From her brother Frederick's information, they discovered at Naples that she had already enriched the family tree at Wyndham Park with olive branches to an incredible amount; and that, by one of those strange transitions peculiar, as it would seem, to the female nature of England, the giddy, thoughtless girl had sobered down at once into a homely domestic matron. Emily Lorimer had rushed from the ball-room to the altar with the love of a diamond necklace and a Brussels veil before her eyes:—while Lady Wyndham was satisfied to devote herself to the after-dinner society of her snoring husband;—to the adulation of her head-nurse—and to the vociferous claims of four frightful ill-managed children.

Of the Duchess of Lisborough, meanwhile, they had thought far more, and heard still less. They knew, from the reports of many an aristocratic wanderer in Italy, as well as from occasional paragraphs in Galignani's Messenger, that her grace occasionally "entertained the fa-

shionable world," and progressed with becoming regularity between London and Calmersfield — between Lisborough Hall and Macclesfield Priory — and so on, *ad infinitum*, throughout all the demesnes, halls, parks, courts, and castles, apportioned by the lavish prodigality of fortune to the illustrious house of Lorton. They were also aware that her grace's *ménage* had remained childless, and that the voice of society had long stigmatised her as "a very exemplary young woman." The word *stigmatised* may perhaps appear on such an occasion to be an error of the press; but be it known that the term "young woman," qualified by so sober an adjective as "exemplary," and pronounced in a certain tone, by a certain set, is purposed to be the most impertinent definition in the world! All charming, or delightful, or fascinating, or enchanting personages, are apostrophised as "*creatures*," or as "*beings*."

It was merely, however, as a matter of idle curiosity that Claudia or Eleanor had sought for any information on the subject. From the very moment that their own views upon any noble or wealthy *célibataire* were decidedly circumvented by some other alliance, he was destined at once to sink to the level of their general and indifferent acquaintance, unless, by his supereminence of rank and opulence, his wife appeared an eligible object of intimacy; in which case they were quite ready to become her bosom friends on the shortest notice. They had already determined to regain, if possible, their former footing at Lisborough House: but as to Lady Wyndham — excepting as a last resource by way of chaperon, during one of mamma's rheumatic attacks — she was far too humdrum to be either useful or ornamental in their service!

It was May; warm, beaming, joyous, budding, buoyant May! — and, even in the metropolis, that genial month makes itself both felt and heard and respired, rich with the odours and sunshine of renovated nature. The squares, yet untarnished with the filthy defilement of soot, and of that unique compound which defines itself as London dust, were quivering with the light verdure of their delicate lime-trees, and bright with the

tufted blossoms of their early shrubs. The groves of Kensington Gardens had already thrown up their pyramidal clusters of chestnut-bloom; the cuckoo was heard anew amid their lonelier glades; the Parks were overspread with that freshness of verdure which, for a single fortnight, defies the wandering tread of busy thousands; and balconies trimly decorated with a profusion of "the scented weed—the Frenchman's darling," overpowered for a time even the motley odours of the public streets.

At such a moment, London may be regarded as in its prime of pride. The season is before us, unsullied by one among the countless disappointments destined to thwart the smoothness of its intercourse. Hope, like a new-fledged phœnix, flutters around the scene, reflecting the bright-hued radiance of its wings upon a thousand objects of inferior attraction. The beauty, in her first season of triumph, listens to the whispers of adulation with sparkling eye and flushing cheek, and a heart yet unsated by their monotony; and young ladies who, like Claudia and Eleanor Willingham, have welcomed for half a dozen successive years the promises of that auspicious month without remembering their mischievous fallacy of the preceding spring, find all their sanguine expectations renovated with its lilacs and laburnums, its new fashions, new follies, drawing-rooms, and *déjeûners!*

It is extraordinary how, year after year, the same routine of dissipation manages to afford a promise of novelty to the same human beings! There are dowagers shaking their palsied heads among the coteries of London, who, for fifty years, have annually predicted a "good season," or "a brilliant season;"—have annually besieged the doors of some fashionable milliner for her last invented hat, and suggested to Rundell some alteration in the play of their antediluvian diamond ear-rings; regardless that these evanescent glories will be displayed in the same box of the same opera-house—in the same hubbub of satin trains and court plumes—in the well-worn saloons of Devonshire House, or of Lady Salisbury's stately mob!—Yet even these, and such as these, welcome the buds of the early May with sanguine expectations of renewed festivity; and

my lord, with his grey hairs — increasing corpulency, and decreasing leg — rushes to the commencement of his forty-fifth session, and stumbles up the steps of Boodle's, or Brookes's, at the spring dawn of a new season, with the same eager enquiries respecting the last Speaker's levee — the merits of the exhibition at Somerset House — the promises of Epsom, and the probabilities of Ascot — which have graced his *entrée* for forty successive years.

Among all these mental delusions, those of the ball-haunting young ladies are by far the most accountable and the most excusable. There is always a bright succession of heirs-apparent to renew their speculations. Every spring, Oxford — and Cambridge — and the grand tour — refresh the fashionable hotels with their quota of silly boys, eager to be ruined or to be married, as the weakness of their heads or hearts may predominate. Every autumn carries a few paralytic fathers and gouty old uncles to their marble homes; and new viscounts, and inheriting baronets, spring up like champignons, to be devoured by the tender famine of damsels on their preferment. We will, therefore, forgive the sanguine earnestness with which every girl, on arriving in London for the season, firmly believes that it will be her last; — that some young nobleman who has been acting charades with her every evening during the Christmas holydays is only waiting for the familiar facilities of a May Fair ball-room to hazard his proposal; and that the white crape dress quilled by the fairy fingers of Maradan, which hangs beside her dressing-table in tempting preparation for the evening's ball, will complete the conquest which her "witchery of noble horsemanship" has more than half achieved in the course of the morning, beside the translucent waves of the glassy Serpentine.

The Miss Willinghams were more than usually self-confiding on the present occasion. Never before had they entered the arena with such appliances and means to boot, as graced their present *entrée*. During their former London experience they had been dependent on obliging dowagers, and condescending friends, for more than half their means of amusement; — they had now only to sigh or smile — to come or go — according to the suggestions of their own

caprice; and they acknowledged no existing obstruction to their happiness and projects, excepting Lady Maria's occasional fits of bilious contrariousness, and Minnie's scrupulous prudery in refusing to enliven her lamented uncle's mansion with the riot of balls and private theatricals.

So little do we know ourselves! and so utterly misappreciate the opinions of the world touching our attractions and means of captivation!—Claudia remained wholly unconscious of the disparition of that exquisite bloom of youthful loveliness which, five years before, had kept the pillow of many a lordling and many a guardsman sleepless on the successive Wednesday nights which irradiated Almack's with her presence; and Eleanor was utterly unaware of the manifestation of a thousand *points* of her graceful figure, which had been formerly veiled by the well-rounded firmness of juvenile health. The yellow tinge occasionally visible after a prolonged vigil of the night before — the languid eye confessing the absence of the tameless energies of girlhood—the parched lip fevered by the anxieties of interest;—these they dreamed not of!—or they might have learned to rejoice in the habits of seclusion adopted by the radiant and lovely Miss de Vesci, whose immediate rivalship would have betrayed their every deficiency. Such, however, is the self-relying blindness of the human kind, that even *then* they might have perchance exulted in the consciousness of superior self-possession and knowledge of the world; and of that nameless something or nothing, which constitutes the airy elegance of *bon ton!*

On the evening of the first ball, which—as the signal of their re-inauguration into the mysteries of the London *beau-monde*—was a moment of considerable importance in their estimation, Minnie announced her intention of seeking her own amusement by drinking tea with Lady Lorimer; whose daughters were both married—whose noble lord had now become an evening fixture beneath the faded tapestries of St. Stephen's—and whose amiable self, confined to her easy chair by a paralytic seizure, still retained all that feminine and dignified composure of character and demeanour, which is one of the most beautiful attributes of matronly maturity. Her daughters, who tenderly loved her, in spite

of their mental incapability of estimating the extent of her moral worth, eagerly resorted to her sedentary presence for counsel and sympathy in all the cares and all the predominating happiness of their prosperous households; Frederick, her eldest son, confided in her bosom with tender respect every secret of his mind and heart; and George — the younger — who had fulfilled his original vocation, and become a reverend prebendary under sanction of Lord Lorimer's ministerial patronage, already formed the sustaining prop of her aspirations after joys of a less worldly character. She was indeed a happy mother! but she deserved to be so; for through life she had been at once an enduring wife, and the woman of the world the least devoted to her own selfish comforts and enjoyments!

"Well, my dear sister," said Minnie, on entering the dressing-room where her sisters were sipping their coffee, and crumbling their *brioches* at two o'clock on the following day, "did Lady Ravenswood's ball answer your expectations? — did you find many of your former friends, and have you made any new engagements which promise well for your amusement?"

"Sit down — sit down," exclaimed Eleanor, clearing away a litter of new novels, new music, *billets*, bills, and patterns of silk, from a sofa near the table, "and we will describe the whole affair. But in the first place, how did *you* get through your evening with Lady Lorimer?"

"So quickly — so much *too* quickly — that I can scarcely remember any thing about it."

"And with what assistance? — Tea, scandal, and backgammon."

"Not one of the three! No!

> We talk'd with open heart and mind,
> Affectionate and true—
> A pair of friends! — though I was young,
> And Matthew seventy-two,"

replied Minnie, laughing.

"Hush! hush! hush! — both the *liaison* and the quotation are so cruelly akin to cousin Mary's solemnities, dearest Minnie! for the love of mercy do not let them drill you into one of the water-gruel school!"

"Well, then, at least amend my errors by some in-

sight into the proceedings of your own fashionable world. — The ball, Nelly — the ball?"

"Was really surprisingly passable! Considering that we are in London, and at the beginning of the season — when and where the machinery of society generally moves with so much difficulty — we had a very lively, well-imagined, and agreeable party. All the world was there, and in good humour with itself and us."

"*Apparemment on vous a fait fête!*"

"We are novelties just now — fresh from the Carnival — bright from a regeneration at Herbaut's! Like Beau Clincher on his road from the Jubilee, people crowd round us to look at our swimming-girdle."

"What can you possibly mean?" enquired Claudia, opening her large blue eyes.

"That every one is dying to see whether the heiress of Bensleigh's sisters are the same human beings who were thought so little of in Seymour Street, five years ago. I assure you, Minnie, 'Miss de Vesci' had honourable mention on all sides; on our *entrée* into Lady Ravenswood's beaming ball-room, I heard your name murmured from the north, the south, the west, and the east. And when, in reply to some fifty invitations which were forced upon mamma in the course of half as many seconds, she gave out that her youngest daughter did not at present purpose to join in the amusements of the fashionable world, we sunk at once full twenty per cent. in the general estimation of the room."

"But not until you had secured your invitations, I trust?" enquired Minnie, with mock solemnity.

"Oh no; but there was nothing very brilliant or tempting among them; — on our own account (Herbaut included) we were fairly and intrinsically worth them all."

"Have you entered them into your engagement-book?"

"After breakfast you shall assist in the operation. *En attendant*, let me tell you *who* were the most eager in their enquiries after Miss de Vesci; and who the most promising for ourselves, in the way of partners, flirts, bore-drudges, and ——"

"Bore-drudges? What manner of animal is that?"

"Humdrums! whom it is both useful and necessary to attach to one's train; in order that one may not waste the time, or lose the society of some more eligible friend, in fetching the carriage and looking for the shawls."

"Thank you; — pray proceed. Had you Sir Joseph there, and Mary?"

"Sir Joseph — *à propos*, of course, to the humdrums? — Yes! my uncle was there in the early part of the evening; and I am forced to admit that Mary Willingham has acquired a graceful ease of manner, which envelopes her ugliness like the elegant drapery of a veil. She dresses, too, much better than formerly; and wears that splendid set of pearls, which mamma used to regret so bitterly among the Heddeston heir-looms."

"And what business has Mary with the heir-looms?" enquired Claudia, peevishly.

"Oh, Mr. Willingham insists upon her receiving all the homage and honours due to the mistress of Heddeston."

"Was my cousin Charles at Lady Ravenswood's?"

"I do not know him by sight," replied the listless Claudia. "I never saw him excepting at that one odious *fête* at Ebury, a thousand years ago."

"Were you not in the room when he called here last week?"

"One never looks at an unavailable cousin; particularly one so frightful and philosophical as Charles Willingham."

"Nevertheless, he *was* at Lady Ravenswood's ball," interrupted Eleanor. "*I* renewed my former acquaintance with him, although almost repenting my condescension, when I found the extent to which he managed to prolong his enquiries respecting Miss de Vesci, and the motives of her absence."

"At least, I trust he did not call me Miss de Vesci?"

"He did, indeed; and I curtailed his process of cross-examination respecting your proceedings, by acquainting him that you were busy at home with Lady Lorimer — signing and sealing despatches to the British embassy at Naples."

"A representation which you knew to be incorrect," said Minnie, with a heightened complexion.

"And which swelled our prudish cousin Charlie into precisely such an air of indignation as you assume just now! — But to return to something better worth talking of — to the ball and our partners!"

"You cannot imagine," observed Claudia, "what a melancholy spectacle is afforded by the skeleton of our old set."

"Lady Robert Lorton?"

"Is not yet come to town. But there is Lady Grayfield — far gone in methodism; — Lady Wroxton ——"

"I do not remember the name of Lady Wroxton."

"The *ci-devant* Mrs. Grandison; who, having buried her little vulgar fussy banker, has bestowed her scrip, omnium, and self, upon one of her former *cavalieri serventi*, a Sir Cæsar Wroxton; who uses her — I will not say like a dog — for his *own* hounds are far more tenderly cared for, — but as so degraded a woman deserves to be used."

"Then of our former partners," continued Claudia, "the *beau reste* is any thing but *beau*. Sir Comyne Wallace is grown lank and lean; and has acquired that languid, *blasé*, smoke-withered look which hot club-rooms, and English fare, and English hours, are sure to inflict."

"English fare! Surely Henry Mulgrave is a far better specimen of the effects of the roast-beef-and-sherry regimen! The little nightingale has grown as plump, and as red, and as coarse, as a widgeon."

"Then Count Russell has dandified his grizzled head under a Brutus wig; and his *sucré* compliments are now incomprehensibly murmured through the interstices of several of those ivory teeth which formed his best patrimony, but which have paid the debt of nature. However, he has wisely given up his beauship; and is now a dining-out, conversation-man — stuffed to the very cravat with pauper colonies and political economy."

"Of all Lady Robert's set, Mr. Tichborne is perhaps the least altered."

"Mr. Tichborne!" exclaimed Miss de Vesci. "Is that wretch still in society?"

"In the most supreme vogue of fashion."

"And what has become of that poor wretched Lady Barringhurst?"

"Divorced — degraded — deceived — abandoned — *forgotten!*"

"And Mr. Tichborne is still received with favour by all her former friends?"

"Of course — the divers destinies of men and women have decreed that the vices which form a triumph for one sex should ensure an unredeemable sentence of reprobation for the other. The *new* Lady Barringhurst was there."

"Her lord married again too? — he is a bold man!"

"*Que voulez vous?* — what could he do with his six motherless children?"

"And Lady Desmond?"

"Barbary, you know, is now Lady Cosmo Somerset; and still the happiest and most charming little creature in the world."

"And her mother?"

"Is perpetually vibrating between the characters of a devotee and a blue-stocking! — She cannot make up her mind which of the two to adopt; — her natural disposition inclines her towards the latter; but whenever she gets a toothache, or a fit of nervousness or of the blue devils, she balances in favour of the former vocation."

"And who, my dear Minnie, who of all London do you imagine to be at its head of the fashionable administration?"

"Why do you give her impossible difficulties to solve?" interrupted Eleanor.

"Pray let me guess!" said Minnie, humouring their folly. "I am of course ambitious to prove my skill in feminine augury; — the gigantic Lady Radbourne, for a maravedi!"

"A Daniel! — a second Daniel! — Lady Radbourne has positively tontined to the top of the ladder; and I cannot persuade any body even to recollect that they ever called her *mauvais ton.*"

"And the young Duchess of Lisborough — has she advanced or retrograded in the calendar of fashionable beatification?"

"She is well spoken of — but appears to possess little or

no influence in the sphere she ought to rule with unlimited sway."

"Perhaps her grace is moderate in her demands; and

'Has her humour best when she *obeys*.'"

"Then does she indeed differ strangely from the majority of her sex! But we shall soon determine the point on our own experience. — Lady Robert Lorton is expected in town within the week; and we have already received morning and evening cards from Lisborough House. I own I am impatient for the result; I am exceedingly anxious to see how 'Benedict' acquits himself as 'the married man!'"

CHAPTER II.

Of temper as envenomed as an asp,
Censorious, and her every word a wasp;
In faithful memory she records the crimes
Or real, or fictitious of the times;
Laughs at the reputations she has torn,
And holds them dangling at arm's length in scorn! COWPER.

MISS DE VESCI did not find her determination of temporary seclusion from the world very vehemently opposed, either by her mother or sisters; Lady Maria being anxious to retain her as long as possible beneath the undivided influence of her own counsels; and the Miss Willinghams being impatient "like the Turk," of sisters near the throne." They soon ceased to molest her; and continued to seek their own circle of friends, and their own round of amusements — leaving Minnie to the happy enjoyment of her harmless pursuits and unassuming connections.

Now although the lovely heiress of Bensleigh was fully aware of the rupture which untoward circumstances had conspired to make between herself and her cousin Charles Willingham, the friend and protector of her childhood — she was totally unconscious of the change of feeling entertained towards her by Mary — her second or rather her third mother, and decidedly her best and kindest friend.

So little indeed did she conjecture that her position relatively to her young guardian could be any matter of surprise or disquiet to Mary, that she failed not upon every renewal of confidential conversation between them to enlarge upon his merits, to revert to his opinion, and to assure her cousin "she was far from doing justice to the merits and attractions of Frederick Lorimer."

"It was yourself and Charles," she would say, "whose eulogies first induced me to break through the ice of English reserve in his favour, and to draw him into my uncle's society; but now that I have learned to know him by my own perceptions, I feel that neither of you have rendered him ample justice."

"Neither of us can pretend to *your* enthusiasm of feeling on any subject," replied Miss Willingham, mildly. "Still, my dear Minnie, I cannot but think that we have been fully conscious of Mr. Lorimer's valuable qualities."

Poor Mary! — to stand accused of moderation in Frederick's favour! She who, for his sake, had renounced so many brilliant prospects, endured so many domestic reproaches, and wasted away the buoyant hours of her youth in solitary repining! No, no! — she felt that she *had* indeed rendered him ample justice, and that the rising pretensions of the heiress of Bensleigh, in depriving her of all hope of profiting by her long ordeal of patient self-resignation, had only added one additional point of anguish to her iron cincture of penance.

There was nothing which Miss de Vesci more truly enjoyed than to escape from the heartless parade of her own gorgeous home unto the chastened calmness of the common-place abode which had sheltered her childhood, and where she still believed herself to be secure of sympathy and affection. It is true that no brilliancy of fashionable levity mingled with its details; that no flippant wit enlivened its discourse; that no hardened women of the world lent the bold fronts of their dashing effrontery to its circle; that no young men of *ton* made it the forlorn resort of their lounging impertinence. There was no attraction there beyond cousin Mary's gentle smile and soothing counsels; — cousin Mary, surrounded by her books,

her work, her music, her easel, her flowers, her birds! But thus had Minnie beheld her, even from infancy; sufficing to her own amusement, yet ever ready to lay aside her favourite pursuits and occupations in order to contribute to the happiness of others. There was no boring Sir Joseph — no Mr. Willingham to interrupt either their stitchery or their gossipry. The former had taken a turn by no means unusual among stupid elderly gentlemen, and had become a member of all the scientific institutions and learned societies incorporated in the metropolis; where the respectability of his name and fortune gave him a sort of factitious dignity, and where he was wont to sit blinking with as much silence and solemnity as an owl tortured by the sunshine for the edification of little holyday boys and girls at the Zoological Gardens.

If the avocations of his son were more effective, they were neither less peremptory nor less engrossing. Charles Willingham was, in fact, enrolled in that holy army of martyrs called the independent members of the House. He was a patriot in the purest sense of the word; a diligent although an undemonstrative searcher into public abuses; a rare but very influential speaker; and altogether and exclusively devoted to duties which, for the most part, are undertaken as a matter of fiction, a matter of routine, or a matter of listless indifference. Charles was a nominal inmate of his father's mansion in Grosvenor Square; but his popularity in society rarely allowed him to dine at home; his evenings were engrossed by parliamentary interests, and his mornings by the studies requisite to their maintenance. Sometimes, indeed, he would steal half an hour from his daily exercise to enquire into Mary's pursuits and pleasures, and to cross-examine her respecting the conduct and character maintained in society by his aunt and cousins; but Miss de Vesci's arrival was the unfailing signal for his immediate escape. Mary, in her turn, would sometimes tax him with an envious indifference towards the interests of his friend Frederick, and remind him that Mr. Lorimer had solemnly appealed to his aid in watching over Minnie's happiness and demeanour. But her disinterested, her *generous*, zeal was unavailing!

"Minnie is far too self-opinionated to bow to any suggestion of mine," was his constant reply. "Besides, she dawdles away half her time with poor, paralytic Lady Lorimer; her future mother-in-law is surely her best guide; and no one can be better qualified than her ladyship to counsel or comfort her in any emergency to which she may be reduced by her own wilful disposition."

Now, although Mr. Willingham was certainly both rash and premature in thus decidedly assigning the excellent Lady Lorimer as Miss de Vesci's future mother-in-law and present guide, there *did* exist a person out of the circle of her own family, who considered herself peculiarly authorised to busy herself in the legislation of Minnie's conduct and affairs. Lady Monteagle was one of those tough

> Dowagers
> Long withering out a young man's revenue,

who appear to be as immortally evergreen and nevergreen as the hedges of yew or cypress in their own old-fashioned shrubberies. It was many years since any person but herself or her apothecary had felt the most trifling degree of interest in her coughs and catarrhs, her rheumatism and opodeldoc; yet still she was most pertinaciously persuaded of her right to be "indifferent" every autumn; "laid up" all the winter; "convalescent" in the spring; and quite strong—"quite herself" again during the genial brightness of the summer; to be just as tiresome, in short, and as troublesome, as though she were still enabled to contribute to the pleasures of society, and of a world wherein she had never performed a single disinterested or amiable action! She persisted in paying long morning visits to persons who would have gladly seen her smothered in her own flannels; and in instituting an endless profusion of idle conversational enquiries, although her determined deafness prevented her from increasing her stock of knowledge by more than one answer in twenty vouchsafed in return by the mercy of her audience.

In all the intenseness of her selfish stupidity, however, Lady Monteagle cherished a species of consciousness which she believed to be a conscience; and which arose,

in fact, from that kind of mental discipline and subordination, ensured by perpetual drilling from the rattan of the world's opinion. And thus, as she had always prudently avoided a recognition of Minnie Willingham's engagement with Lord Stapylford during the days of his prosperity, she felt herself precluded from positively insisting during his absence upon Miss de Vesci's adherence to her plighted faith: she had, in fact, enlarged too publicly and too positively upon the absurdity of youthful betrothments, and the unfairness of upholding their claims, to put forth any decisive right on the part of her grandson to the hand and unexpected inheritance of the heiress of Bensleigh.

She was not, however, the less sanguine in her dear Montague's favour; nor the less eager to ascertain the exact state of Minnie's affairs and of Lord Stapylford's prospects of ultimate success; and as she found by the unfailing "Not at home" of the new porter in Portman Square that her name had found its way to Lady Maria's list of the excluded, she naturally turned to Miss Willingham—to the gentle Mary, her much-enduring country neighbour—as the only available source of authentic information on the subject. To this end, having deliberately and wheezingly groped her way as high as the Grosvenor Square drawing-room, she anchored her speaking-trumpet at her ear, and commenced her course of cross-examination.

"Well, my dear Miss Mary!—and so I perceive by the newspapers that your cousin Willinghams are making a great figure in London again; flirting, and dressing, and dancing away—and all, I make no doubt, at the expense of poor Miss de Vesci."

"Of *rich* Miss de Vesci," replied Mary, smiling at her petulance. "But you surely forget that Lady Maria is in possession of a tolerable jointure of her own."

"Every shilling of which, I am persuaded, she lays out in Exchequer Bills; or perhaps invests in some savings bank. I will venture my life that Lady Maria Willingham never spent a sovereign of her own, in any instance where she could manage to sponge upon other people's pockets. My dear! I know her to be a very, *very* interested woman."

"With the exception of a short period, her pecuniary means have always been so limited as to necessitate rigid economy; and no one, I think, can blame her for making her own interest—which includes that of her daughters—a first, or at least a very important, consideration."

"But not at the cost of other people! No, no!—my dear Miss Mary!—believe me there is nothing more contemptible than interested selfishness! Now only observe to what general condemnation she has exposed herself and her daughters, by all the matrimonial speculations they have hazarded during the last twelve years. Not a single young man of rank and fortune has appeared in the world during that period, who has not been besieged by the assiduities of Lady Maria, and by the smiles of the Miss Willinghams."

"*Not* twelve years—they have not been out more than —but I will not affix a date to their *début*. For my own sake, I choose to consider the birthday of every young and unmarried lady to be like Easter—a movable feast. But I assure you, dear Lady Monteagle, I am only six-and-twenty myself; and my cousin Claudia is very little my senior."

"By exactly two years and five months!" exclaimed the accurate dowager, who remembered to a day and an hour the inauspicious births of both. "But time is not always to be measured by years. Claudia and Eleanor came out—as it is called—at fifteen; and have been racketed about at all the balls and fooleries of all the courts in Europe from that day to this. There has been no interval to their dissipation—no peaceful country retirement for their autumnal and winter months; always Bath or Brighton—Spa or Baden—Pyrmont or Plombières—Bagnères or Barrège—Pisa or Abano—as a relief to London, and Paris, and Brussels, and Rome! They have made the tour of Europe in search of an establishment; and, at length, with all their wit and beauty they are as little regarded as St. Peter's or St. Paul's—or any other public monument which the whole world has gaped at till it is tired."

"Believe me, my cousins are very universally admired;

and considering the favour with which they are received in society, and the manner in which they contribute to its ornament and amusement, it is not wonderful that they should have contracted a taste for mixing in the world."

"*A taste!*—an absorbing passion, you mean! Those girls are never happy except amid the blazing of lights and the scraping of fiddles. And even *that* I would forgive, if it proceeded from a girlish love of pleasure; but with them it is all a speculation—all a trade;—ay, and one that will end in bankruptcy, or I am very much mistaken."

"It is reported that Lord Basingstoke is very much attached to my cousin Claudia."

"Pho! pho!—I do not believe a word of it. Lord Basingstoke is one of those shy young men who are very much attached to any one who will take the trouble of making love to them;—one of those creepmice who run away with their mother's waiting-maid, or marry an actress, for want of courage and patience to encounter the formalities of an honourable courtship. But I fancy Basingstoke saw quite enough of the Willinghams in Italy to have made up his mind on the subject long ago, had there been any real fancy on his part towards Miss Claudia;—he was with them, you know, both at Florence and Naples. And, by the way, my dear Mary, pray tell me what is all this strange history I hear about Lord Lorimer's son being appointed guardian to Miss de Vesci."

"It is no less strange than true. Mr. Lorimer was on the spot, and connected with the family; which probably induced General de Vesci to repose some confidence in ——"

"Confidence! why Frederick Lorimer cannot be above three years older than my poor grandson Stapylford!"

"Exactly!—he is a year older than myself."

"I remember when he used to pass half his holydays at Heddeston;—and some people thought he would make a very pretty match for *you*—being your brother's friend, and brought up so much together."

"Persons brought up together," observed Mary, mournfully, "very seldom dream of marrying."

"Oh! pardon me, my dear young lady!—Look at

your cousin Minnie and Stapylford;—I really think *their* attachment commenced before they were five years old, and their engagement before the boy had got through his Latin grammar—umph?—what have you to say to that?"

"That they are not yet married," observed Mary, in a low voice.

"My dear?"

"I observed that their *marriage* had not yet taken place."

"Why no!—certainly not;—untoward circumstances, you know—and Montague's unlucky expedition to India—umph?—To be sure he did it all for the best—all for *her* sake—umph?—Minnie must have been fully aware that he sacrificed his own eager inclinations to promote the eventual prospects of their union—umph?"

"I never heard my cousin utter one syllable on the subject; but I confess that in *her* place I should have been more flattered by the option of accompanying the man to whom I had been so long formally engaged."

"All arising from consideration for herself!—all springing from disinterested regard to Minnie's personal comfort, you may depend upon it, my dear!—and should she ever mention the subject to you, you may assert as much on *my* authority."

"Miss de Vesci has too good an adviser in her guardian to seek counsel from *me*—and——"

"A guardian of seven-and-twenty!—So romantic and absurd and indelicate an appointment surely never was heard of!—The only way in which I can account for this strange infatuation on the part of a sensible man like General de Vesci is by supposing him aware of Mr. Lorimer's intimate friendship with my grandson Stapylford, and with Lord Stapylford's long engagement to his niece—umph?"

Mary smiled, but said nothing.

The dowager put up her trumpet interrogatively.

"I am as little acquainted with my cousin's matrimonial entanglements as with General de Vesci's views; but if I remember rightly, Mr. Lorimer and Lord Stapylford had subsided into a very moderate degree of friendship previous to his lordship's departure from England."

"You don't think now—(of course, my dear, I enquire in confidence)—you don't think there is any likelihood of any thing of an attachment between Miss de Vesci and Mr. Lorimer?—Those Lorimers are very artful, manœuvring, successful people;—witness the way in which Lady Wyndham and Lady Meredyth, without money, or beauty, or talents, contrived to establish themselves;—and the manner in which Lord Lorimer has crept up in his old age towards the Treasury Bench.—I find that Lady Lorimer, with all her sanctification, leaves no stone unturned to monopolise the young heiress?—Umph?"

"Minnie is extremely fond of Lady Lorimer, who is one of the most estimable women in existence."

"Nonsense—estimable! what do you suppose one of Lady Maria Willingham's daughters can care for an *estimable* woman?—Umph?"

"Miss de Vesci was not brought up by Lady Maria," observed Mary, proudly.

"Fortunately for herself, and for all who are interested in her good qualities! My dear, I am fully aware of the influence *your* excellent counsels must have upon her young mind—your excellent counsels, Mary, and excellent example: excuse an old woman's praises who has known you from your childhood. But still I think you will allow that Lady Lorimer, in her Merlin's chair, is not exactly the companion to be voluntarily chosen by a young heiress like Miss de Vesci.—Umph?"

"I can only assure you that *I* have no companion of my own age whose society I have ever found more gratifying and more enlivening than that of Lady Lorimer."

"*You* are a reasonable being, and——"

"And so I assure you is my cousin. She is so altered—so grave—so womanly—that I can scarcely recognise my little wild untameable Heddeston pupil."

The dowager was at once puzzled by the announcement of these symptoms, and by what she regarded as Mary Willingham's unpardonable reserve on all other points of the affair. Fortunately it occurred to her recollection that another country neighbour—Lady Wyndham, the sister of Frederick Lorimer—was probably equally well in-

formed on the subject, and better inclined to impart her good information; for the fair Gertrude, among those praiseworthy qualifications of the matronly estate which she had acquired since her auspicious hymeneals with the Kentish baronet, had altogether neglected that of governance of the tongue. Lady Monteagle was fully aware that the unruly member of the lady of Wyndham Park was nearly as ill-regulated as during the days of her ball-flirtations; she therefore hastened from the demure Mary, in the full persuasion of worming Miss de Vesci's secret out of the sister of her youthful guardian. A child chasing a rainbow could scarcely have evinced more fruitless and infatuated eagerness in the pursuit, than did the feeble old dowager in her profitless undertaking.

CHAPTER III.

Now look on Simo's mate;
No ass so meek — no ass so obstinate. POPE.

But although Miss de Vesci found herself thus cavalierly excluded from the intimacy of her former friend and protector, although Mr. Willingham avoided, with marked reserve, all occasion to seek her confidence, or interest her in his own pursuits, his career was too public and too brilliant to escape her notice and knowledge. If still at times the most sportive and animated creature in existence, in many respects Minnie had "put away childish things." The uncertainty of her early destiny — the peculiar perplexities attending her entanglement with Lord Stapylford — her painful consciousness of the opinions generally entertained respecting the efforts of her mother and sisters towards achieving a brilliant matrimonial establishment — and above all, the melancholy scene she had recently witnessed at Naples, and its connection with the counsels of Mr. Lorimer — had tended to sober the buoyancy of her spirits, and to assign the groundwork of her future conduct to solid principle, rather than to those youthful impulses of action by which it had been hitherto influenced.

She was eager, among other duties of more pressing importance, to mark her respect towards the memory of General de Vesci, by consulting the remembrance of his personal prejudices and predilections; and being aware that he cherished a high respect for the Westland family in general, she resolved to overcome her own distaste for their vulgar pomposity, and to comport herself towards them with the friendliness of kindred. At her particular request therefore—for Minnie's requests had now become absolute with her mother—Lady Maria condescended to accompany her to the successive hecatombs offered upon the altars of the wealthy heiress, by every member of the calculating tribe; and thus while her elder sisters were enjoying their little impromptu dinners with the Duchess di Villa Armagnano, or Lady Robert Lorton, Miss de Vesci was enduring the solemnity of some gorgeous display in Cavendish Square, or of some over-acted gastronomic pageant in Portland Place.

At tables such as those of the Westlands, there exists so little of the coterie-intercommunication distinguishing the gossipry of the fashionable world, that the newspaper publicities of operas and plays, exhibitions and executions, levees, and drawing-rooms, and parliamentary debates, generally provision the commissariat department for the war of words. More than one member of the Westland family, indeed, was seated in that honourable House, whose verbal war is virtually the *property* of the public; and Miss de Vesci—albeit little of a politician, and at present most femininely indifferent to the state of the nation—found herself obliged to swallow her *patés* and cutlets in daily audience of the recapitulated debates of the preceding night. In these, and throughout all similar discussions, the name of her cousin Charles found honourable mention. His eloquence, his sound logic, the temperate views of his disinterested patriotism, and the surprising influence over the ear of the House already attained by one so young and inexperienced as Mr. Willingham, afforded a constant subject of wonder and admiration to the guests at large, and of sincere interest to her own feelings.

With this excitement to animate the solemn festivals of

the Westlands, Miss de Vesci found herself singularly patient and forbearing towards the hordes of vulgar, parading, glistening, rustling, over-dressed Pancrasian dames who were delighted to display their elaborate finery, and affected ill-breeding, for her edification; and while Lady Maria was mystified beyond description by the difficulty of finding subjects for discourse with personages so totally foreign to all her own sympathies of thought and action, Minnie continued to win upon the general regard of the circle by her unaffected courtesy, and by the readiness with which she seemed or strove to enter into their habits of existence;—into their exaggerated interest in the *début* of every new foreign singer—their intimate version in the politics of the theatres—in the merits of fashionable milliners and personalities of fashionable novels—and in the probable success of an ensuing charity ball at Willis's rooms. She felt, indeed, that she should have thought better of *them* and of their powers of conversation, if they had not affected to be quite so *fine*—quite so superior, both to their neighbours and to their own condition; and was sometimes tempted to fancy that the lady duchesses and countesses, the chosen friends of her elder sisters, were somewhat less presuming in their demeanour, and infinitely less fastidious in their encounter with the ordinary occurrences of life—but then their graces and ladyships had little to say touching the "meeting of the friends to free trade at Freemasons' Hall," or the "general views of the city upon the abolition of colonial slavery!"

Although sufficiently flattered by the adulation with which, in virtue both of her birth and fortune, she was welcomed among the Ladies Westland and their calculating husbands—the Commissioner—the Director—the Chairman—and the K. C. B.—Minnie became a dupe neither to their flatteries, nor to her own predilections. She was fully aware of the immeasurable gulf fixed between the upstart tribe and such persons as Lady Cosmo Somerset or Mary Willingham, in refinement of mind and manners, and in that unpretending simplicity which forms the noblest polish of high-breeding; and nothing amused her more than to return home from the pompous festivals of these

flies upon the wheel of society, and find her sisters overflowing with details of their own set — with scandal from Almack's, and malicious wit from White's — and intimately persuaded, in their turn, of the utter inutility of any race of human beings living in exclusion from those holy tabernacles of fashionable sanctity.

It was upon the conclusion of one of Sir Robert Westland's most sumptuous and most prosy dinner-parties, that Miss de Vesci, on her return to Portman Square, exhausted by the sickening baseness of the homage she had received on all sides, found Claudia and Eleanor installed in her dressing-room in their gayest and most communicative mood; and eager to relate the events of an evening which had introduced them, for the first time, to the society of the young Duchess of Lisborough.

Under the protection of their friend Lady Robert, they had been enjoying the polished but inane elegance of Lady Cosmo Somerset's boudoir circle; nothing had been done for their amusement; — no dancing — no music — no cards — had broken in upon the delicious do-nothingness of the little coterie; yet they had felt themselves fully entertained, and not one moment of *ennui* had endangered their spell of pleasure. They had been mingling with persons whom they exactly suited, and who were exactly suited to themselves: persons whose whole business was pleasure; whose whole pleasure was a selfish enjoyment of the luxuries of life; whose abstract idea of moral excellence consisted in the good breeding which keeps all selfishness out of view, and consequently out of the danger of collision with that of others; persons, in short, acknowledging no law but that of good breeding — no object in life but an easy, and agreeable, and rapid annihilation of their superfluous time.

The marriage of Lord and Lady Cosmo had immediately succeeded the departure of the Willinghams and the Ebury *fête;* his lordship having speedily turned from his flirtation to his allegiance to the young and lovely Barbara; who, on her part, was very ready to believe in his professions that his indiscreet connection with Mrs. Grandison had been a mere boyish freak, tending only to increase the

ardour of his purer affections, and to disgust him at once and for ever with the artifices of coquetry and the bribery roses of unhallowed love. Lord and Lady Desmond had also been persuaded, though not without difficulty, to bestow the hand of their darling daughter upon a suitor whose handsome person and countenance boded many a peril to the peace of her future fire-side; but who, as a younger brother, was scantily supplied with the means of endowing her home with any other than tranquil domestic pleasures. Lord Cosmo, however, was too well connected to languish long in poverty or obscurity: the crumbs which fall from ministerial tables form the natural subsistence of all dogs of notable pedigree; and as long as secretaries are wanted merely to sign their honourable names in endorsement of official returns, it is just as creditable and useful to the country at large, that those names should be Howard, Percy, Russell, or Seymour — as Thompson, Johnson, Brown, or Smith.

Lord and Lady Cosmo were accordingly very easily provided for; without any extraordinary diminution of the national revenue, or any inconvenient liberality on the part of the houses of Desmond or Somerset. Lord Cosmo's "ayes" and "noes" were understood to be at the immediate service of his majesty's ministers, at whose instigation the independent burgesses of the borough he represented in parliament had honoured him with their distinguished preference; while Lady Cosmo was enabled to pay her bills at Maradan's and retain he equipage and opera-box, without taxing the splendid poverty of her own illustrious parents. Her husband's official avocations chained her somewhat closely to the routine of a London life; but it was a life she knew how to enjoy and to embellish. Her house, although offering no competition with the brilliant *fêtes* of more opulent triflers, was the rendezvous of all the best society; while her popularity remained unrivalled both with her own sex and with the one whose admiration forms a far more dangerous distinction. She was, in fact, so much beloved and so much courted by that class which adores the sight of whatever is young, and beautiful, and prosperous, that the envious had already begun to anticipate

misfortune for a person whose destiny had been hitherto all sunshine; and the malicious to predict some evil result from all the idolatry lavished upon her loveliness. At present, however, the cloud remained remote and invisible; nor had the breath of calumny yet dared to sully the "virgin page" of her spotless life.

Lady Cosmo was eager among those who had joyfully welcomed the return of Eleanor and Claudia Willingham to their former circle; and having in some degree shared the anxieties and vicissitudes of their earlier career of matrimonial ambition, she was curious to observe the first meeting between Claudia and the Duke of Lisborough; and to learn the opinions of the lively Eleanor touching the demure little duchess, her sister's successful rival.

"Do you expect the Lisboroughs to-night, Barbara?" Lady Robert Lorton had enquired, on entering the room with her young friends.

"I *did* expect them," replied Lady Cosmo, laughing as she spoke; "for the duke assured me last night at the Opera, that they would look in on their return from some royal dinner to which they were engaged. But he rode after me this morning in the Park, in the most vehement hurry and agitation, to make his excuses."

"And why?"

"Between his own nervous incoherence, and the noise of the carriages passing at the time, I found it difficult to ascertain the terms of the apology; but I suspect Anastasia had discovered that the Willinghams were arrived, and were likely to be of the party; and that she would neither come herself nor give him leave of absence."

"How absurd!—or perhaps the duchess considered Lisborough's visit to your box last night too prolonged and too amusing. I was sitting with her, and observed that she never moved her glass from your face during the whole time."

"But her glass gave her no insight into the subject of our conversation?"

"Pardon me!—she saw that the duke was laughing heartily at all your lively sallies—an exertion—poor fellow!—which he seldom hazards in her immediate pre-

sence. And, by the way, she made me the *souffre douleur* for all your sins and his; and grew so silently sullen, that if Wolryche had not brought some of his bad puns into the box, I should have expired of the bores before the close of the ballet."

"Poor fellow! the Duke of Lisborough!" reiterated Eleanor Willingham, overcome with surprise and curiosity. "Can you possibly mean that Duke Absolute the First has degenerated into a hen-pecked husband?"

"And hen-pecked by such a dove as Lady Anastasia!" said Claudia.

"Why you seem to have heard nothing of the Lisborough House politics," resumed Lady Cosmo, greatly amused. "You appear ignorant that the Temple of the Graces has become a mere petticoat-government house;—that Lisborough dare not order his poodle shaved without leave; and as to invitations, I question whether he retains the privilege of offering a corner of his table to his chaplain."

"As to Robert and myself, for his life's worth he dare not ask us to dinner without a previous family consultation," added Lady Robert Lorton.

"And by what tact or talent has the duchess attained this miraculous degree of influence over so positive a man?" enquired Eleanor, still more and more amazed.

"Talent!—she is as dull as a November fog!—But having just discrimination enough to forewarn her that he *was* positive, she met him in their very first struggle for supremacy incased in such a buff-coat of sullen obstinacy, that he found it impervious to all ordinary weapons. The little duchess had also the wisdom to enrol herself in Charlotte Grayfield's sect—the clan of the All-Excellent;—and with the assistance of her demure demeanour, and apathetic silence in society—a sort of selfish deference towards the opinions and interests of her own family, and a callous firmness in all her dealings with her husband—she passes for a prodigy of virtue and understanding. You will hear her quoted as the most prudent, sensible, amiable, unassuming woman in existence;—you will find her stupid, and unamiable, and uncompanionable."

"You astonish me beyond description!" exclaimed

Claudia Willingham. "Possessed of every gift and every blessing to embellish and endear existence, how is it possible that the Duchess of Lisborough can retain this sort of sullen indifference?"

"In the first place, she is afflicted with a jealous and ungracious temper; in the next, she knew herself to be indebted to accident and artifice rather than to Lisborough's preference, for the honour of his hand; and instead of attempting to acquire the qualifications likely to conquer his affections, she resolved to maintain her conjugal influence by a far less pleasing method. Then she has been disappointed in her hopes of giving an heir to the house of Lorton, and the very sight of Lady Robert's son is wormwood to her; and above all, she is peevishly conscious of her own want of attractions, and is as ill-temperedly jealous of the duke as if he were handsome or agreeable, or endowed with any other merits than those of his rank and fortune — which are of course available only to herself."

"Nay, now you are too hard upon poor Lisborough," interrupted Lady Robert. "He has more good taste and good feeling than half the men one meets in society; and since he has been so thoroughly subdued and overcrowded, I have found him infinitely more agreeable than in the rampant days of his high mightiness. But my dear Lady Cosmo! — what have you been dreaming about? — There they are; positively *there* are the Lisboroughs seated on the sofa in the inner room. Look through the folding-doors!"

Lady Cosmo, raising her glass in the direction pointed out, and perceiving that Lady Robert Lorton's assertion was perfectly correct, hastened to pay her compliments to her unexpected guests. While she was occupied in receiving the formal explanation of the Duchess of Lisborough, Lady Robert whispered to Eleanor, who was still completely mystified by the whole scene, "Now would I venture my life that Anastasia has been tormenting the duke out of his very patience by her affected irresolution about this very party for the last two days. One of the artifices through which she increases the importance of her conscious nonentitysm, is by rendering all the minor incidents and trifles of life a matter of endless discussion; and as

she is wholly incapable of any action of importance, she thinks it right to make it appear of consequence whether she uses her chariot or her barouche—her grey horses or her brown. Thus she perplexes Lisborough to death by pretended uncertainties, when she has as obstinately grounded her purpose as the Eddystone beacon; and I am satisfied that at the very moment she despatched him yesterday with her excuses to Barbara, she had predetermined to come here, for the purpose of mortifying Claudia by the spectacle of all her diamonds."

"I concluded that the royal dinner was the motive of her unusual brilliancy."

"I remember last year there was a *fête* given by the Duke of Shropshire to the Margrave of Baden, at which Lisborough was anxious she should appear in her utmost *éclat*."

"A distinction which feminine vanity rarely rejects."

"Anastasia's vanity, however, is light as air, compared with her love of supremacy. It was exactly an instance to prove that she had a will of her own, and that she would maintain it; so, assuming her meekest air of sullen humility, she did honour to his royal highness's invitation by a muslin dress without the foreign aid of one single ornament;—thanking Heaven all the while that she was guiltless of the sin of worldly pride!"

"Tormenting creature! And is the duke submissive under all this capricious arrogance?"

"Fairly hectored into the tamest domesticity! And the worst of it is, he is fully aware that no one pities him;—his own former assumptions having predisposed the world to glory in seeing him thus fairly matched. Claudia, for instance, cannot fail to exult in the degradation of his conjugal destinies."

Eleanor had soon ample means of personally authenticating the exactness of Lady Robert's and Lady Cosmo's representations, by observing the embarrassment of the Duke of Lisborough's address, in his interview with Claudia. It was sufficiently evident that the annoyance and apprehension betrayed in his demeanour was derived less from his remembrance of former scenes than from his certainty that

the duchess was spitefully watching his every word and every movement; and still more, from his doubt as to the line of conduct she would herself pursue on so delicate an occasion.

Her grace had, however, taken her own resolution; and, as usual, pretty determinately. She chose to be a victim! —a poor, meek, persecuted wife, driven by the tyranny of a despotic lord to offer her abject homage to the former, and perhaps the true object of his secret affections! Approaching Eleanor and Claudia, with the humblest deference, she proceeded to overwhelm them with gracious courtesies and most perplexing condescension. She appeared to wait their orders to be seated;—their permission to smile;—their sanction to assume her accustomed place by the side of the Duke of Lisborough;—who, with the most painful embarrassment, stood waiting the issue of the pantomime; neither daring to defeat her folly by irony, nor to terminate the exposure of all parties by an open exertion of authority. Eleanor was already out of all patience with his forbearance; but Claudia could only bestow her sincere commiseration upon the self-sought humiliation of her former lover. She even good-naturedly attempted to modify his manifest distress, by supplying some indifferent subject for general discussion.

"We have been so long strangers in England, that we find our little knot of friends sadly dispersed. Time and absence—death and marriage—have left us very few familiar faces to greet our return."

"Miss Willingham shows her admirable knowledge of the world by such a classification," answered the duchess, with the patient smile of a martyr. "Death and marriage! —Yes! You are quite right in reminding your friends that these terms are synonymous."

"When we left London five years ago," continued Claudia, without noticing her spiteful interruption, "Lady Robert appeared to entertain a hope that the duke and yourself might be persuaded to join her on the Continent; and during our residence abroad, we were constantly in expectation that you would verify her prediction."

"Lady Robert had doubtless consulted the Duke of

Lisborough's known taste by such an arrangement; and it was probably very selfish on my part to interpose some little consideration towards my personal feelings. But I am a poor simple creature—born and bred in England—affecting none of those high-wrought sensibilities which require the excitements of foreign refinement, and luxury, and novelty. I am so old-fashioned as to love my own country, my own home, my own family; and I plead guilty to having been the means of discountenancing my sister Lady Robert's obliging plans."

It was but too true that the girlish, unassuming, devoted bride, selected by the despotic Duke of Lisborough, had resolutely negatived the very first project of his married life—and had thus defeated the most important objection of the rash connection, by peremptorily declining even a temporary residence on the Continent; and she now recorded her original triumph with so malicious a sneer, that Lisborough was in agonies lest she should meditate some further exhibition of her omniscience. He even welcomed the accession of Sir George Wolryche and Mulgrave to their little group, with a degree of grateful cordiality which he had never thought to bestow upon persons of such equivocal importance in the fashionable world. But even their opportune arrival served, alas! only to display the ill-natured absurdity of his wife in a new light; for upon Wolryche's presuming to recount some trifling *on dit* of fashionable scandal, perfectly adapted to ears both polite and feminine, she thought it her duty, as Lady Grayfield's pupil, and a severe stickler for minor proprieties, to appear shocked; and to desert a circle thus disgracefully abandoned to modern indelicacy of word and deed.

Now, in repeating the minutiæ of the whole scene for Minnie's edification, Eleanor Willingham contrived to lighten its details by such exquisite mimicry of the duke's fussy and tremulous embarrassment, of the duchess's sanctified demureness of voice and feature—scarcely serving to mask the real malice of her intentions—and of Lady Robert Lorton's polite attempts to disguise her alternate impulses of amusement and disgust, that Miss de Vesci could not but join heartily in their laugh at the expense of

Claudia's fickle adorer. From the general hints she had recently gathered of the Duke of Lisborough's former conduct towards her sister, she was perfectly satisfied to find that his importance in the world of fashion had been reduced by his marriage to its true level; that he was still personally estimated as one of the most distinguished and respectable of British noblemen; but that his rule as the unimpeachable autocrat of the western world of London was no longer recognised by its adoring multitude.

"I have no doubt," observed Minnie listlessly to her sisters, "that he will now become a very agreeable personage. Every one used to assert that the charm of his elegant mind and manners was only defeated by that giddiness of brain which must afflict all idols nourished upon incense; and now that his grace is permitted to walk the earth instead of being elevated on the shoulders of his worshippers, his step will become more firm and self-possessed."

"I trust you will soon judge for yourself," observed Eleanor. "The duchess made a thousand courteous enquiries after you, and invitations to us all; and when you really make up your mind to appear in society, you cannot begin better, Minnie, than by Lisborough House; which, although no longer what it was—The Temple of the Fairies—of course continues to unite the most select society of London."

"Thank you—thank you!—but I have no immediate intention of taking my first rash step in the mighty maze. Next season will be quite time enough for me to mingle in your pleasures."

"We have half promised to drive down to Ebury some morning with Lady Robert Lorton; and the duchess has undertaken to make up a little impromptu party for us there, as soon as the lilacs and laburnums have put on their ball-dresses."

"*Ebury!*" exclaimed Miss de Vesci, starting and colouring. "What have all those people to do with dear Ebury?"

"Lord Stapylford had it, you know, only on lease; and at the time of—of——"

"At the time of his *ruin*, it fell into the hands of his creditors, or of the owner," pursued Minnie, with perfect composure.

"Exactly."

"But surely it never was the Duke of Lisborough's property?"

"Never! nor is it now. But the perverse Anastasia, finding him possessed of the most beautiful *bijou* of a villa ever imagined or perfected by mortal taste, immediately decided that the damp air from the river was prejudicial to her health; and that nothing would suit her fancy or her constitution but Ebury, where there is a stagnant lake."

"And which she therefore compelled him to purchase."

"Not precisely; for it is the unattainable property of some minor, locked up in that House of Correction, the Court of Chancery. She obliged him, however, to hire it for her; for, like other humble, simple, unpretending martyrs of her caste, she half ruins him by the expensive gratification of all her childish whims."

"Dear Ebury!" observed Miss de Vesci, in a fit of profound musing. "To think that five years — five irrecallable years have expired since the day of that delightful *fête!* — To think how circumstances, and persons, and feelings have altered since that happy day!"

Her sisters looked significantly at each other; believing her reminiscent thoughts to be occupied with Lord Stapylford, of whose claims upon her tenderness both were extremely impatient.

"If you will not think me too capricious," pursued Minnie, with a guilty blush, "pray get me included in Lady Robert's and the duchess's invitation. I have not altered my intentions already with regard to the 'mighty maze;' I shall not interfere with your balls — your Almack's — your opera — my dear sisters! — But I own that few things would give me so much gratification as to visit Ebury again! Young as I am, I find myself compelled to be a votary of 'The Pleasures of Memory!'"

CHAPTER IV.

The town has tinged the country; and the stain
Appears a spot upon a vestal's robe,
The worse for what it soils. The fashions run
Down into scenes still rural, but, alas!
Scenes rarely graced with rural manners now. COWPER.

LADY MARIA WILLINGHAM'S maternal position relative to Miss de Vesci was one of extreme embarrassment and perplexity. From Minnie's early childhood, almost from the moment of her birth, her ladyship had so determinately shaken off that tenderest of ties which unites a mother to a child — a child to her parent, — that with all her tact, and all her wilfulness, she could hit upon no argument and no pretext by which to sanction the re-assumption of her lawful authority. She found herself debarred from all share or participation in the execution of General de Vesci's will; and she knew that her former demeanour towards both the Westland family and Mr. Lorimer had predetermined the trustees of the young heiress to resist her very first attempt at interference.

The worst grievance of all, to a woman of so vile a temper, was that her total want of power forbade her to avenge herself upon the innocent object of her displeasure; and that while she dared not tyrannise over the child on whom depended so much of the comfort and respectability of her future days, she could not so much as find a pretext for discontent in Miss de Vesci's deportment towards herself.

Respectful and gentle in her bearing towards her ungracious parent, Minnie was far better disposed than either of her sisters to tolerate Lady Maria's fits of ill-humour, and to sympathise with that lassitude and those growing infirmities, which the decline of life so lavishly apportions to the martyrs of habitual dissipation. Her own lively and playful disposition, although considerably subdued by circumstances, enabled her to parry and divert those selfish repinings of the decaying woman of fashion, arising from shattered nerves and disappointed expectations. She saw that Lady Maria was harassed with an eager curiosity to

pry into the secrets of her heart, and bring to light and publicity the true state of her feelings and engagements; but on this head — being well aware that the dictates of motherly tenderness would have little share in suggesting either her enquiries or her counsels — Minnie continued to maintain a scrupulous and dexterous reserve. Both Lady Maria Willingham, therefore, and her elder daughters, were perforce compelled to await the period of Mr. Lorimer's arrival in England for a final elucidation of their doubts and difficulties touching the future intention of his ward.

The first object with all parties was the matrimonial settlement of Claudia and Eleanor during the interim; a purpose in the fulfilment of which they were no less sanguine than resolute; for Lord Basingstoke continued to accept their advances with very encouraging graciousness; and Eleanor, in the deficiency of higher game, had commenced a vehement flirtation with Sir Comyne Wallace, who for many years had been secretly and unwillingly captivated by her attractions. In spite of being what is termed "a man about town," Sir Comyne was endowed with much good sense, and some good principles; and although a poor baronet, and generally stigmatised as a detrimental, and unequal to the expenses of a fashionable establishment, he was known to have a clear two thousand a year at his disposal; — a settlement sufficiently tempting to a girl in the decline of her beauty, and under the stigma of a general recognition of having failed in her more ambitious speculations. To become Lady Wallace, and independent of Lady Maria's peevishness, was a forlorn hope not to be neglected!

It was with these views to stimulate their measures, that the little party to Ebury was eagerly prompted by the Miss Willinghams. The Duchess of Lisborough, amiably anxious to convince them of the joys of that destiny which she had wrenched from their attainment, and to mark in the decision of her arrangements her despotic maintenance of her matrimonial rights, lent herself very readily to the plan; and Eleanor and Claudia, having taken their friend Lady Robert into their private councils, were fortunate in

securing an invitation for their sister, and the attendance of Lord Basingstoke and of Sir Comyne for themselves.

"Excepting Barbara Somerset," observed Lady Robert Lorton, as they were arranging the preliminaries of arrival and departure on the previous day, "I cannot promise you any very agreeable female accessions to the party. Lady Grayfield and the duchess together have contrived to filter their acquaintance to so marvellous a degree of moral purity, that their circle is as insipid as it is cold. That they should exclude such personages as Lady Wroxton and other decidedly mischievous members, I can heartily sanction. But there is Lady Rachel Verney, the most agreeable woman in London — modest and elegant, and of singular propriety of demeanour — an old friend of the duke's, and placed by her fifty years beyond all possible reach of future scandal——"

"And what can their prudery find to urge against her?"

"That Lord Grandville has dined with her husband several times a week for the last five-and-twenty years, and that so very prolonged an intimacy with a stupid man like Mr. Verney argues undue attraction on the part of his wife!"

"What an invidious decision! The attraction is just as likely to be on the side of his French cook, or his excellent cellar of wines."

"Lord Grandville, in point of fact, suits the Verneys, and they suit him; they know the same people and entertain the same opinions on most points; it is the mere force of habit which binds them so closely together."

"Do you remember, that when some courtier complimented Madame de Pompadour on the constancy of Louis XV., she gave exactly the same explanation? 'Were my apartments at Versailles to be changed, so as to compel his majesty to ascend a different staircase in order to visit me,' said the sultana of the king, 'the routine of his life would be discomposed, and he would probably desert me!'"

"Rely upon it, then, that were Mr. Verney to sell his house in Chesterfield Street, or to dismiss Lagrange, there would be an end of the friendship which so deeply scan-

dalises poor Charlotte and Anastasia! Nevertheless, I should scarcely recommend Lady Rachel to attempt the sacrifice for their sakes—for she would obtain neither thanks nor compensation; their solemn tribe of the All-Excellents is the most boring set in London."

"But surely it is rather an impertinent piece of presumption on their part to attempt the regulation of the households and private affairs of other people."

"Oh, that is a Lorton mania! and the fault has not been amended by a connection with the Burgoyne family; who are vehement reformers, and feel themselves required, by a sort of inherent and hereditary purity, to enlighten all the Gentiles and sinners of the earth. Leaving Christian humility—the most beautiful and holy of virtues—entirely out of the question, they annihilate you with the sum-total of their annual subscriptions to public charities; with the number of sermons they have heard and read in the course of the year; with the missionary societies whose meetings they have attended; and with the downfall of the multitudes of frail mortals they have discountenanced and driven from society."

"In short, they seem to 'make broad their phylacteries,' and to neglect the sweet impulses of true charity."

"Exactly!—there *is* an instance—but I will not discuss the subject—it makes me too angry!—and, for the sake of family peace, I am willing to keep on good terms both with Charlotte Grayfield and her very promising catechumen."

On the following day, however, the "instance" alluded to by Lady Robert forced itself more immediately on the attention of all parties; and Eleanor, who was something of an enthusiast, found leisure between the pauses of her flirtation with Sir Comyne to join in the utmost indignation of her friend.

Fortunately for the sentimental reminiscences of Miss de Vesci, the season of the year precluded a very intimate comparison between Lord Stapylford's Ebury and that of the Duchess of Lisborough. The former celebrated *fête*—"the feast of roses," as it had been called in its day of

triumph—had occurred in July, when nature is beginning to languish under the fervours of continued sunshine. At present they had only reached the middle of May; and the cool green shrubberies were still brightened by the golden streams of the laburnums, with intermingling clusters of lilacs and gueldres-roses, cystuses and rhododendrons. The frail shoots of many of the later trees and shrubs were still pale with their tender varieties of verdure; and the fresh and promising smile of springtide was yet untinged by the luxurious and luxuriant ripeness of summer. The meadows, too, presented that varied tapestry, of exclusively English growth, which enamels their level verdure with a thousand idle but exquisite weeds—with countless varieties of every bright reflex of the rainbow; showing like the blossomed haunts of fairy-land, and overshadowed by spiral clusters of chestnut-bloom, by the quivering lime-trees, and by the bright blue sky, smiling in joyful lustre above them all.

And Minnie, in gazing around her as they crossed the laughing Thames, and penetrated the bowery avenues of Roehampton, felt her heart oppressed by the glorious refulgence of the scene and of the hour. Her mind was undistracted by schemes for the captivation of the heroes on horseback, who ever and anon passed and repassed her barouche; bending over its burnished panels for the interchange of a whisper with Claudia and Eleanor, or of a word or two of polite ceremony with poor Lady Maria and her rheumatism. She was careless even of the attractions of her own new bonnet; although it was in truth an exquisite realisation of one of Claudia's daintiest imaginings, and from the hands of Maradan herself, Minnie found leisure beneath its friendly shade to sacrifice an unseen and silent tear; either in tribute to the beneficent gifts of nature distributed on every side around her, or to those secret recollections prompted by the well-remembered scenery which they served to adorn. The lodge-gates of Ebury Park, while they quickened the pulsations of her heart to an almost painful pitch of agitation, now reminded her that it was time to control those feelings for the investigation of the critical eyes she was about to encounter.

But although the Duchess of Lisborough evidently intended to be as gracious as her dull and undemonstrative nature would permit, the Willinghams, long accustomed to the cordial greetings of the Continent, would have been somewhat chilled by her grace's manner of reception, had it not been neutralised by the smiling friendship of Lady Robert; who had preceded them, and who was seated on the beautiful lawn in expectation of their arrival. *Her* greeting, however, was incautiously framed with regard to the sensibilities of *one* member of the little group; she was not yet sufficiently acquainted with Miss de Vesci, or sufficiently aware of the gentle delicacy of her feelings, to consider either her or them as an object of deference. To Lady Robert she was at present only a pretty little girl — the rich heiress of Bensleigh Park; she had yet to learn that Minnie was one of the most disinterested, amiable, and fascinating little beings in the world!

"Who would have thought," she incautiously exclaimed, extending her hand to either of the Willinghams, — "who would have thought that we three should meet again in these gardens of Armida — and neither 'in thunder, lightning, or in rain,' — but under the influence of the same love of pleasure, and the charm of the same glorious summer sunshine! Laud we the gods, meanwhile, who have left us for five mortal years in the enjoyment of these same buoyant impulses of existence; while so many of our comates and companions of the Ebury *fête* have been wrecked and stranded on barren shores; so many removed from our sight by death and disaster."

"You greet us right morally this morning," replied Eleanor, blushing deeply; for she had been fully conscious of her sister's depression of spirits during their drive. "You should have reserved that knotty sentence for our departure — it would have better graced *l'envoy* of our day of pleasure."

"A lady's arrangement!" interrupted Sir Comyne Wallace. "Ever postponing the moral to the last bitter moment! even as the salutary dregs of the cup of health are allowed to fall to the bottom."

"Remember it is yourself only who have defined physic

and moral reflections as synonymous potions," said Eleanor, laughing.

"We will throw both to the dogs just now," interrupted Lady Robert Lorton. "Barbara Somerset has been waiting for us these ten minutes, to make the tour of the American garden, while the duchess performs her etiquette duties of reception. The duke is stationed with Lady Cosmo, and impatient to be gone; or his little tour will be intercepted altogether by his lynx-eyed guardian."

"And who are those two foreigners with Lord Cosmo Somerset?"

"The young Duke of Saxe-Altenburg and his bear-leader, Monsieur de Béthizy."

"I should not have thought the Duchess of Lisborough would tolerate any thing ultra-marine. She talked to us the other night as if the Straits of Dover were the only moral palladium of England; and hinted that nothing less than quarantine was satisfactory to her feelings after the infection of Paris."

"Why as to Béthizy, I dare say she wishes him fairly at the bottom of the lake yonder; but Lord Cosmo, who is tolerably high in the foreign office, and obliged to do the courteous and hospitable to these wandering high mightinesses, has contrived to reconcile both Charlotte Grayfield and the duchess to this Saxon *Durchlaucht*."

"By what sage argument, or justifiable imposture?"

"By neither; the simple fact that Melancthon was born in his highness's dominions — was originally sanctified by the protection of his highness's ancestors — and that he finally bequeathed some kind of tattered vest and cassock as a controversial trophy to their posterity, sufficed to captivate their interest in the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg's favour. They have oppressed him with civilities ever since Somerset revealed this orthodox and interesting coincidence; and the poor little duke, whose head is full of the mazurka, and whose heart is said to be equally occupied with the new *prima donna*, is completely mystified by their incessant recurrence to Melancthon's legacy, and to his own good fortune in reigning over a branch of the elect."

They had now reached the beautiful spot — a group of

larches overhanging a fountain which seemed to spring from a natural rock overspread with creeping plants — where the Duke of Lisborough and Lady Cosmo were waiting their arrival. Lisborough appeared to welcome his presentation to Miss de Vesci, whom he had hitherto overlooked as a mere child, in order to escape the embarrassing consciousness of receiving Claudia Willingham for the first time under his matrimonial roof; but Lady Robert heard, or fancied that she heard, a very regretful sigh burst from his grace's lips as he gazed upon her still lovely face, and listened to the graceful courtesies with which she replied to the compliments of Lord Basingstoke, on whose arm she hung. Lady Robert, for the more intimate satisfaction of her curiosity on the subject, accepted that of the duke; Sir Comyne took charge of Eleanor and Minnie, and the little party proceeded gaily on its projected expedition.

It was a beautiful day; the Ebury gardens were bright with innumerable varieties of flowers, both exotic and of familiar growth. The blossomed thickets seemed bursting with the redundant song of their feathered population; and the fountains chimed melodiously in many a shadowy nook. Here, an ornate terrace, graced with marble statues, half hidden by surrounding shrubs, presented a miniature resemblance of the stately bowers of Louis le Grand; and further on, some leafy desert, abandoned to the wild shagginess of untrimmed nature, formed a beautiful contrast with the decorated tone of the preceding scenery. Those who had been long absent from the spot were careful to note, with admiring graciousness, the wonderful improvements wrought in every department by the tasteful interposition of the duchess; but while her guests were thus carefully and unnecessarily courteous towards the absent dryad of the scene, her grace was by no means equally amiably-disposed towards themselves. Some idler of the party having marked the auspicious outset of their journey of discovery, and noticed it to the duchess by way of a piece of intelligence highly gratifying to her hospitable feelings, she could not for a moment resist the gratification of disorganising a harmless project calculated to advance

the happiness of half a dozen unoffending persons, without previous reference to her own intentions. She had no idea of allowing her husband and his friends to be amused without a direct reference to her will!

Scarcely, therefore, had they penetrated a quarter of a mile of the shrubbery, towards the margin of the lake, when a panting page, heated and out of breath, was despatched to overtake the duke, with a message of request for his immediate return. "The duchess's love, and she trusted he would lend her his assistance in entertaining the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg." The whole party, however vexed in secret by this inopportune interruption, immediately volunteered to accompany his return to the house. But of this the Duke of Lisborough would not hear.

"No, no! let me beg of you to proceed! — Lady Robert will form a far more experienced cicerone than myself," said he, stealing a deprecating glance at his fair sister-in-law, whom he suspected would profit by his departure to put the case, and his own humiliating conjugal position, in their true light. "The fact is, that poor dear Anastasia is so extremely timid" — he tried to direct this observation more particularly to the Willingham party — "that she cannot bear to be left with strangers. Let me entreat you to excuse both her and myself; and to pursue your original intentions."

Minnie was delighted to find that Lady Cosmo and the rest were acquiescent with this proposal of the duke's; and as he slowly retraced his steps towards the villa, she cared very little for the burst of surprise and contemptuous commiseration which marked his departure. She cared very little for Claudia's astonished sympathy, or Lady Robert's indignant comments; — for they had reached the borders of the lake! — They were actually standing close to that well-remembered spot where Stapylford had rescued her from its waters, five years before; and where Charles Willingham had breathed his displeasure at her rash adventure, in terms of familiar and affectionate reproof now, alas! no longer addressed to the heiress of Bensleigh!

It was a beautiful scene! — The woods diversified with

their countless variety of early foliage were feathered down towards the lake, whose margin was in some places fringed with thickets of gorse and broom — now sheeted with blossoms — in order to afford shelter to the water-fowl. At intervals these brooding solitaries might be heard wailing among the rushes; while here and there a majestic swan led forth its callow train of cygnets as if proud of her premature maternity. Clustered round the tiny islands dotted over the waves floated the broad and glossy leaves of the water-lilies, appearing to support the opening glory of their crisp and snowy blossoms. It was a beautiful scene!

Apparently the whole party became severally and profoundly conscious of its magic charm; for insensibly the little group divided into scattered sections, and "*chacun y chercha sa chacune!*" Lord Basingstoke withdrew the willing Claudia beneath a screen of quivering beech-trees, and persuaded her to seat herself beside him on the short smooth herbage round their shaft-like stems; Eleanor and Sir Comyne amused themselves by searching among the flowery reeds for the nests of the wild-fowl; Lady Robert and Lady Cosmo Somerset, who were engaged in a most vehement discussion of the Duchess of Lisborough's jealousy and absurd impertinence, unconsciously and by degrees strolled off in another direction; and Minnie found herself at length in the very position she could have desired —

Alone — upon the solitary shore!

For a beautiful girl of eighteen to be alone — and alone and meditative in a beautiful spot — is to say in other terms that love is the subject of her reverie! Miss de Vesci's thoughts were probably of the same tender and gentle character with those which would have waited, under similar circumstances, on any other of her sex; and to judge from the expression of her lovely countenance, they were no less sad than sweet. But it would have been a matter of extreme difficulty, even to those most intimately acquainted with the position of her affairs, to attribute their sadness, and sweetness, and tenderness, to their true and several

sources. It might be the recollection of Lord Stapylford and his village of Lortonsdorf which he had abandoned and scorned for her sake on that very spot five years before;—it might be Gaietà and the bending of the shore there, with its Neapolitan associations of her youthful guardian — of the absent Frederick;—it might be the recollected alienation of Charles Willingham, the friend and playmate of her youth, which so grievously oppressed her spirits, and brought unbidden tears into her eyes!—Whatever the exciting cause, the effect was positive—that the young and beautiful heiress, as she stood beside the glassy waves, felt herself the most lonely and desolate being that ever gazed upon the reflection of nature in her mirror of solitude!

As Miss de Vesci stood musing with fixed and mournful steadfastness upon the unruffled surface of the lake, some chain of sentimental association brought to her recollection that remarkable scene in the romance of Madame de Staël, where the features of Lord Nelvil are revealed to Corinne by moonlight in the waters of the fountain of Trevi at Rome. She started! for as the visionary image touched her mind, she saw distinctly on the water before her the shadows of two approaching figures, and she smiled consciously through her tears as the involuntary words burst from her lips, "Alas! *my* Oswald is far enough from Ebury Park!"

In another moment she perceived that one of the intruders wore the thin, lank, ungainly figure of Lord Robert Lorton; but again she started, and more eagerly than before, when in his companion she discerned one at least of the three absent objects of her regret — her cousin Mr. Willingham. During the slow approach of these gentlemen, she prepared to welcome their unexpected appearance with ceremonious politeness; yet she could not refrain from whispering to herself, in pursuance with the visionary train of images she had previously conjured up,—"The hero of the fountain appears!—but rightly indeed did I conjecture that its waters would serve to reflect no lover of mine!"

CHAPTER V.

Ce n'est pas le premier amour qui est ineffaçable, il vient du besoin d'aimer; mais lorsqu' après avoir connu la vie on rencontre l'esprit et l'ame que l'on avoit vainement cherchés, l'imagination est subjuguée par la vérité. DE STAEL.

LORD ROBERT LORTON, according to his ordinary colloquial custom, was diffuse and tedious beyond measure in the expression of his surprise at finding Miss de Vesci so unceremoniously abandoned to her own devices.

"He sincerely trusted," he said, "that Lady Robert had not been wanting in attention to any of the Duke of Lisborough's guests;" and was only prevented from going in immediate search after his wife, with a view to further enquiry and reprimand, by his anxiety that Minnie should become minutely acquainted with all the causes of his very late appearance at Ebury — of his finding out so exactly the place of her retreat — of his having prevailed upon his young friend Mr. Willingham (whom he had met at Brookes's) to accompany him to a little party which indeed he might almost term a family party — of all and every thing in short which he had done, or thought, or felt, or imagined for the last four-and-twenty hours!

Before he had arrived at the concluding term of his eloquence, and of Miss de Vesci's patience, he fortunately caught a glimpse of Lady Robert's hat as she loitered with Lady Cosmo Somerset among the fragrant thickets of the broomy knoll; when leaving his further explanations to the charge of "his young friend," he set off to recapitulate his evidence to his wife and her companion with the same leathern and inexpressive visage, in the same sentences of inconclusive dulness.

"I had thought, Minnie — until Lord Robert was so obliging as to correct my error this morning — that you purposely refrained from joining in the gaieties of the season. I understood from Mary that you had made up your mind to decline all invitations for the present."

"There is nothing very dissipated, I should imagine," replied Minnie, rather pettishly, "in a morning visit to

Ebury. My own stupid company and the solitary banks of the lake are the attractions by which you have found me enticed from Portman Square."

Mr. Willingham cast his eyes, according to the indication of her own, upon the surrounding scenery; where, at the moment, no single human being appeared to mar the sylvan solitude of the spot.

"The *attractions* you find here are probably of reminiscent origin," said he, carelessly. "The Ebury of to-day has, indeed, little to offer you."

"You are right, Charles, for once, *quite* right," replied Minnie, speaking with determined courage, as if in defiance of his insinuations. "It is the remembrance of this very spot, as I found it on my *last* visit, which has moved my heart with feelings of mingled joy and bitterness, exquisitely painful—but which I would not exchange for those of unmixed happiness."

Mr. Willingham now felt himself compelled by formal politeness to offer his arm to his cousin, that they might seek the remainder of the party; and in their progress it chanced that they were obliged to follow the very same footpath through the long grass, which, on the day of Minnie's girlish adventure, they had pursued with Lord Stapylford. He even fancied he could perceive Miss de Vesci's arm tremble with emotion as they passed the lodge wherein her mischance had been concealed from Lady Maria's angry detection: but it is probable that he was mistaken in his conjecture; for in another moment Minnie, rallying her spirits, began in her turn a bantering attack upon her cousin, touching *his* appearance at Ebury among a set of the idlest triflers of the day.

"I was not aware, Charles, that *you*, a grave politician—a reformer—a statesman—ever found yourself tempted into such vain and frivolous society."

"Nor does it often occur; but——"

"But the very moment Lord Robert proposed a plan of pleasure to your acceptance, you were only too happy in finding an excuse to desert the respectable congregation of square-toes, in St. James's Street, and fly to Ebury Park."

"Exactly! for I had a latent motive which urgently prompted my seeming want of resolution."

"Of course. How could you be otherwise than anxious to ascertain if pretty little Lady Cosmo Somerset be truly so lovely as report avoucheth."

"As I have frequently the pleasure of dining with Lord Cosmo, you must seek further."

"You probably wished to make the acquaintance of the fair-haired Saxon duke, and his Mephistopheles."

"Wrong again! I have known them these three weeks. The moment Monsieur de Béthizy became aware that I was cousin to the rich Miss de Vesci, he begged to be presented to me, by way of advancing a step nearer towards an introduction to yourself."

"I trust you were charitable enough to forewarn him that Miss de Vesci—rich or poor—does not share in the passion entertained by her family for foreigners."

"Of Miss de Vesci's opinions and preferences I have lately known so little, that it would be the height of presumption on my part to make any declaration of the sort."

"I am at least glad to find you *conscious* of the alienation. I was apprehensive that Minnie had too entirely escaped your memory—to——"

"*Minnie*—alas! my dear cousin!—has altogether ceased *to be*—both for myself and others! My sister has long lost her little pupil, and I my little playfellow; and Miss de Vesci, meantime, has attracted too many friends, too many followers, too many flatterers, to have allowed us to find any compensation in *her* society for all we have been obliged to renounce."

"You do not admit, then, that it has been your own want of cordiality and Mary's coldness which have so sadly limited my visits to Grosvenor Square? You are *unjust*, Charles, as well as ungracious; for you are perfectly aware that till this moment's interview—the result of chance—you have not given me a single opportunity for unrestrained conversation with you since my return to England."

"I do not deny it! To what end should I seek your society? You are now surrounded by the tender cares of

your own family — by the adulation of the world: — Lady Maria has ever regarded me with an unfavourable eye, and between your sisters and myself scarcely the common sympathy and friendliness of kindred has been permitted to exist."

"But you are not ignorant that my mother and sisters do not materially influence *my* feelings towards the rest of the world; nor interpose the slightest restraint upon my intercourse with my friends? Among those — among the very few whom I may presume to call so — there is not *one* particularly acceptable to my family; yet I have never found them inclined to oppose my predilections."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Willingham, with an incredulous air, which summoned a guilty blush to the cheeks of his companion.

"Besides," resumed Minnie, "if no kind feeling towards one whose childhood you were once so forward in fostering and protecting has proved sufficiently powerful to engage you to overlook any little petulant quarrel arising between us, the common courtesies of life might have prompted an occasional visit of *ceremony* to the widow and daughters of your uncle."

"I have so long been taught to feel miserably unqualified 'to amble gently in a lady's chamber,' that I have renounced the general society of the gay world. You well know that you have often yourself upbraided me as a mere bookworm; — have you not?" said Charles Willingham, evidently touched and gratified by Miss de Vesci's remonstrances.

"Every worm has its butterfly season! By your own account you dine frequently with the Cosmo Somersets, who belong exclusively to the great world; and as to your feats as a carpet knight, I am satisfied that you do not refrain from ambling in Mary's drawing-room — who is the only person boasting a nearer claim upon you than myself."

"Mary is satisfied to take me as I am — with all my uncouth, unfashionable habits; and Mary has no other friend to counsel and protect her."

"And who have *I*? — What brother affords me his sanction or his advice?"

"You have your guardian, Mr. Lorimer, to fulfil both duties."

"If you will trouble yourself, Charles, to recollect, it may occur to you, that before Mr. Lorimer's office existed — long, very long before my uncle's death — you had adopted your present line of conduct towards me. Before I left Heddeston to visit the De Vescis, you had ceased to treat me with kindness and confidence."

"Indeed! — you seem to note my misdemeanors with a very accurate registry! But you will at least allow yourself to be *at present* better guarded and more tenderly cherished than poor Mary, whose claims upon my affection you are willing to reject."

"If you mean through my engagement to Lord Stapylford," said Miss de Vesci, attempting to retain a tone of composure, "I think your own observation must have satisfied you that it has afforded me very little support in the world, and *as* little self-gratulation. If you allude to the kindness of my guardian, Mr. Lorimer — which, under very trying circumstances, was certainly most generously extended towards me — allow me to remind you, that the advice and consolation which must necessarily travel by the post from Naples to London is somewhat tardy in its operation, and difficult of command."

"I may therefore offer you my congratulations; for Lorimer will very shortly arrive in England: and my services will become too quickly unavailing to render it necessary to offer them now, at the eleventh hour."

"I have been long aware that Lorimer would leave Naples before the close of the summer; — a circumstance, Charles, which need scarcely have interrupted your visits in the interim."

"He will be here within a few weeks! My object in visiting Ebury Park this morning was to acquaint you with an event which you ought not to learn from strangers."

"An event? — you alarm me! Has any thing happened to Frederick?"

"*To Frederick* — nothing! But Lord Lorimer, on leaving the committee-room of the House of Lords, was

seized with an attack of apoplexy; and, as it is foreign post-day, I thought it right instantly to expedite the intelligence to his son, with a request for his immediate return to England. Lady Wyndham, who was too much agitated to address her brother on this melancholy occasion, desired me to acquaint Mr. Lorimer that no hope was entertained of her father's recovery."

"How very dreadful! — how very sudden! — that vain, pompous, heartless man to be so unexpectedly summoned to his account, and with no one to regret or lament over him."

"Lady Lorimer," observed Mr. Willingham in a tone of some severity, "is a woman of sound principles — of sterling excellence; and although there may exist persons to be benefited by the death of this poor, old, selfish man, who may regard his sudden decease as a matter of indifference, or even of exultation, yet I venture to believe — to *trust*, for human nature's sake — that his wife will not lightly regard the loss of the husband of her youth — the father of her children — the companion of her long and honourable life! Lord Lorimer has been a man of unblemished moral character — free from the stains of every grosser vice — and highly respectable in his degree; and I am unwilling to suppose that such a person can pass to his grave unmourned, at least by those of whose being he is the author."

"You have interpreted a casual remark somewhat severely. Heaven forbid that I should imagine Lord Lorimer's family insensible to his loss; but as a member of society — as a Christian — and as a man — I cannot but consider him a selfish, hollow, sordid, time-serving, ostentatious personage; incapable of any noble virtue, and bowing the knee to Baal, wherever the molten image may chance to be set up."

"It is yourself, Minnie, who are caustic and severe now," said Mr. Willingham, smiling at the vehemence of strictures which were only too critically correct. "But you at least have no reason to deal upon this erring brother so rigid a measure of justice; for I understand that since your return from Naples he has left no effort unattempted to conciliate your feelings towards his family."

"Lord Lorimer has been indeed singularly gracious. All-statesman as he is, and in despite of his grey hairs, *he* at least entertains no disinclination for ambling in ladies' chambers."

"He is probably pre-encouraged by the certainty of a favourable reception; — he is conscious of claims upon Miss de Vesci's polite forbearance."

"Of claims superior to your own? — You can hardly think it, Charles! — His son is by law my guardian; — his excellent, his delightful wife, is by my choice, and by her own condescension, my friend. But what were *you*, what was Mary — when I was left in England, a little friendless and deserted thing! — unportioned! — uncared for; — with no protection but through the mercy of your family — no consolation but through the tender affection of my two cousins?"

Miss de Vesci's voice trembled so feelingly as she spoke, that Charles Willingham could not refrain from pressing her arm to his side. "You over-rate our deeds, my dear cousin," said he in a low voice, "as much as you have suffered yourself to undervalue our feelings towards you; yet for your own sake, as well as for ours, I could wish that you had never been induced to think differently."

"I never have — believe me — trust me — I never have."

"Hush, hush! — do not let us renew our long chapter of grievances. And above all, do not give my friend Lorimer — (almost as old a friend, Minnie, as yourself) — reason to suspect, on his return, that I have neglected his charge to watch over you during your separation, and to contribute to your happiness by the scanty means afforded me."

"And *did* Frederick delegate this commission to your hands? How kindly done — how like himself! From the period that I first began to share in the sports of your Heddeston holydays, Mr. Lorimer has been undeviating in the brotherly friendliness of his conduct towards me. *He* indeed offered me no professions, nor made it a point of conscience to judge severely of my motives and actions; but he has never wounded me by caprice, nor humiliated me by neglect."

" Verily he has his reward !" ejaculated Mr. Willingham, with irrepressible vexation. " For he has acquired the power of teaching you to forget feelings which others had believed to be indelible — to break through ties which others had imagined to be immutable. He has made you renounce every thing, Minnie, excepting your love and confidence for himself."

" I must leave him to plead his own cause with his former friends," replied Minnie; " for I find that my eloquence scarcely avails even in my own favour. But since we are about to enter the magic circle of fashionable sorcery" — they had already reached the outskirts of the lawn, and were within sight of the gay groups scattered over its verdant level — " suffer me previously to express my hopes that a degree of better understanding is about to exist between us; and that if your avocations are such as to prevent all friendly intercourse with any but your political associates, you will not attempt to dissuade my dear cousin Mary from treating me with the regard and affection which was once the solace of my life."

" *I* dissuade ! Can you suppose ——"

" Not a word more ! We are within reach of Lady Grayfield's inquisitorial powers. I choose to feel myself satisfied that you are somewhat more kindly disposed towards me."

Lady Maria Willingham, who, from her station in the conservatory, had detected the approach of her favourite daughter, advanced — rheumatism notwithstanding — into the open air, to greet her with the intelligence of Lord Lorimer's sudden decease; which had been brought from town by one of the latest loiterers of the party. She was exceedingly curious to discover the effect which this distressing event would produce upon the feelings of Miss de Vesci; and was slightly but silently shocked by the equanimity of deportment with which she received the intelligence of her lover's accession to the peerage.

" I verily believe," thought Lady Maria, as she quickly retraced her steps towards the house, in order to secure an advantageous post previous to the announcement of dinner, — " I verily believe that Minnie would be quite as well con-

tented to become a paltry Mrs. Frederick Lorimer as to find herself a viscountess. I certainly am blessed with the most inaccessible, insensible daughters in the world!"

In this opinion, by the way, her ladyship was strikingly mistaken; one among those three daughters being at that moment a martyr to the bitterest torments of remorse. Eleanor Willingham, even seated as she was by the side of Sir Comyne Wallace during dinner, listening to his gentle nothings, and pledging him in Champagne, could not forgive or forget the perverseness of her destiny, which had urged her to the refusal of the only man for whom her heart had felt a preference; and who, from the moment of her rejection, had run through every gradation of prosperity towards his present eminence as a viscount, with a fortune of twenty thousand a year! She seemed to have declined the hand of Mr. Frederick Lorimer — the paltry contemptible younger brother — only that he might eventually be enabled to lay his coronet and his opulence at the feet of her sister Minnie!

A thousand circumstances conspired to augment her regrets and self-accusation. Immediately opposite to her at table, sat Miss de Vesci, unusually excited by the events and agitation of the morning, and consequently animated into a double portion of youthful beauty; appearing to engross the exclusive attention of her cousin, Mr. Willingham, whom Claudia and herself had always allowed themselves to treat with marked neglect; and whom they now discovered to have acquired, during their absence from England, a very considerable influence in society, independently of his brilliant worldly prospects. He was looked up to as one of the most rising men of the day, even in that very select circle of the aristocracy, which formed the utmost limit of their own desires and interest. Either of them would have found in the only son of Sir Joseph Willingham "a match" equal to the most sanguine hopes of their ambition; but till very lately they had continued to regard him as the sandy-haired offset of the Bodham *mésalliance*, and obscure beyond the redemption of fortune or of title. It was *now* too late! Eleanor felt that it was too late! In her cousin Charles she had forfeited a second chance of an auspicious matrimonial connection!

Another unpleasing object attracted her attention in the course of the repast. Sufficiently near to her sister Claudia to afford a very trying daylight contrast to her somewhat faded complexion and sharpened features, she detected two strikingly lovely girls, in the first bloom of youthful innocence; gentle and unassuming in their air, but acquiring through that very absence of pretension a charm beyond the practised graces of worldly art. Eleanor Willingham looked at these rival buds of beauty, again and again, and with eager scrutiny; and satisfied herself that she had never seen them before. But she could not so readily account for some sort of indefinite mental reminiscence, which appeared to attach itself to the lady by whom they were accompanied. She was quite young and rather pretty; but had contrived to modulate the expression of her features into so rigid an air of precision and misanthropic coldness, that it would have been difficult to decide upon her age, and was impossible to conjecture the position she occupied with regard to her fair companions. Eleanor Willingham felt her personal curiosity strongly excited by the whole party; and accordingly whispered an enquiry in Italian to Lady Robert Lorton, who was placed near her, monopolised by the tough intricacies of a cut-and-dried "dinner discourse" with Mr. Russell,—the ex-beau, and actual conversation-man.

"Do you not know them?" whispered Lady Robert, in return. "They are the Barringhursts;—two charming girls, and, as you perceive, the image of their miserable mother."

"And that person in the dark-green pelisse is Lord Barringhurst's present wife? I feel as if I ought to recollect her, without remembering why or where."

Lady Robert answered by a significant look, seeming to advise a postponement of the enquiry; and Sir Comyne Wallace, in compassion to the inquisitive vein of his fair friend, observed in a low voice to Eleanor, "She was governess to the girls;—a saint of Lady Grayfield's selection, who contrived to inveigle Lord Barringhurst into promoting her to the head of his table, and the guardianship of his motherless daughters, by the professed severity of her prin-

ciples and practice. We will forgive him, poor man, for mistaking reverse of wrong for right ;—for fancying that as a highly-born, and highly-bred, and highly-agreeable woman had turned out so ill, he had scope for better expectations in a clergyman's daughter ; secure from all connections and friendships in the great world ; and as chillingly disagreeable as his most conscientious self-denial could require. Lady Grayfield and the duchess swear she is a miracle of accomplishments and excellence ; for my own part I never look at her without wishing that Tichborne had chosen to wither *her* prospects, and exile *her* from our society, instead of that gentle, graceful Lady Barringhurst ;—who I verily believe was indebted for her ruin to the indolent impossibility of opposition. We could have much better spared this Miss Milicent Darnham."

" Darnham ?—ah ! the mystery is now explained ; her father was our Heddeston curate ! This very Lady Barringhurst, as a child, was our constant playmate, and exactly such an automaton of wire and buckram as she still appears."

" Automaton or not, you will hear her common-place opinions quoted in the duchess's set, as momentous axioms of an original system of ethics. She always appears to me like a child's copy-book, or a marble-paper juvenile edition of ' The Blossoms of Morality,' put into action. Her conversation is made up of sententious declamations ; not of ' prose run mad ;'—but of prose extremely calculated to render other people so."

" What is the cause of the tremendous stir at the other end of the table ?—Even the Duchess of Lisborough appears roused to animation !"

" Did not you hear the groom of the chambers whisper an announcement of the mighty Empress of the West ? who always manages to increase the evidence of her importance by these tardy arrivals. Excepting in a family-dinner with her lord, I do not believe she has seen fish or soup upon the table for several years."

" In former times I remember that no one presumed to take those liberties with the Duke of Lisborough ;—the Calmersfield guests ate and drank and slept by the moment-

hand of a chronometer. But of what empress are you speaking?"

"'England can bear but one Elizabeth!' as our bonny Bess said of yore to her lovely Scottish rival; and London can endure but one Lady Radbourne."

"I remember the day when that very *one* was voted one too many, by half the fashionable world; and was utterly overlooked by the other half."

"Hush, hush! such treason will bring you to the block. See with what eagerness they all rise to welcome that colossal goddess;—observe with what condescension she accepts their incense. *Treason* did I say! one 'choleric word' against Lady Radbourne is now 'flat blasphemy!'"

"They might just as well worship the huge marble head of Memnon in the British Museum."

"Once more, take pity on yourself, and refrain from such adventurous libels! Do you remember Horace Walpole's allusion to a very apposite fable in which, at the close of a prolonged war among the beasts, Cornet Hog comes to be a field-marshal, and Corporal Ass to be a commander-in-chief?—Such is the progress of fashionable warfare! Patronesses of Almack's are mere mortals; one woman of *ton* dies—another, like Lady Barringhurst, runs away—a third, like Lady Desmond, vibrates between devotion and blue-stockingism, and is lost to the wicked and the ignorant world. What is to be done? The ministry must be filled up—the cabinet-council must sit;—and those who, like Lady Radbourne, have patience to beat about upon the Goodwin Sands of insignificance, waiting the turn of the tide, are sure to find themselves afloat at last, and sailing majestically into port."

"Like a stately seventy-four as she is!—Nevertheless I should have thought that Lady Robert Lorton's little yacht-club would have manœuvred to keep her out of the harbour."

"And why?—since not one of their number would have been at the trouble of deafening themselves with all the royal salutes a flag-ship is obliged to fire. They would have been bored to death by the rigid maintenance of mar-

tial law and nautical subordination, which it is the business and pleasure of her life to uphold."

"Still I cannot fancy that Lady Robert enjoys seeing her become the tyrant of the high seas."

"Lady Robert recedes every season still further from the tumults and disputes of the great world; she has never recovered that affair of Lady Barringhurst's, which cut her to the very heart; her own daughters are growing up — are almost presentable; and, excepting from family etiquette with the Lisboroughs, and from choice with Lady Rachel Verney, and Somerset's charming wife, she maintains very little intercourse with society. You must have found us sadly dispersed — sadly altered; nevertheless I trust your return will form a keystone to a new arch, and that the best days of our little set will be renewed."

Sir Comyne Wallace sighed as she spoke; but it was less from the influence of any sentimental emotion, than from the unsatisfactory recollection of his wasted youth; wasted upon a tribe of useless objects, and upon that little knot of associates whose dispersion he affected to regret. His interest in Eleanor herself arose in a great measure from her personal connection in his mind with those buoyant days of youth, when the ordinary march of existence assumes the airy charm of a dream. He felt that they had left him nothing to cling to in the way of substantial happiness; and rather than exert himself to seek new objects of ambition or affection, he feebly extended his hand in companionship to one who had run the same idle course of levity with the same fruitless results as himself. He had serious thoughts of proposing himself at some future time to Miss Willingham's acceptance; but he felt the measure to be so much a matter of routine — so much like paying an annual bill, or dismissing his hunters to the straw-yard — that he evinced little of a lover's eagerness in a pursuit where he felt pre-assured of victory.

Meanwhile Miss de Vesci seemed destined to enjoy at this eventful meeting the first-fruits of her heiress-ship; and to receive confirmation strong of the justice of her cousin Charles's decision, that Monsieur de Béthizy had sought his intimacy solely with a view to the future ac-

quaintance of the lady of Bensleigh Park. Seated at dinner between the two — between the calm, undemonstrative Mr. Willingham, and the vivacious, eager, and garrulous foreigner — she diverted herself not a little with their various modes of rendering themselves agreeable. Charles seemed only anxious to excite *her* to conversation — to develope *her* views and feelings — while Béthizy, even in the hottest discharge of his torrent of words, found occasion to allude to nothing and to no person but himself. To a certain degree he was clever and brilliant: — his repartees and anecdotes were sparkling and original; but from beginning to end they were, in fact, only portraits of Monsieur le Comte de Béthizy — miniatures, full-lengths, busts, and statues!

For a moment Minnie was almost inclined to be pleased by the liveliness of his flattery, and by his insinuating address; but when she discovered that his unceasing loquacity proved an impediment to Mr. Willingham's attempts at a renewal of his confidential conversation — when she perceived that her cousin was really mortified by seeing her exposed to the interested devotion of a fortune-hunter — she became at once disgusted by Monsieur de Béthizy's pretensions. It was not, indeed, that Charles Willingham believed her in the slightest danger of becoming ensnared by the wily approaches of the handsome young Frenchman; but sharing in all the prejudices entertained by thorough-going English country gentlemen against foreigners in general, and fortune-hunting foreigners in particular, he felt irritated by this ocular demonstration of the perils, and dangers, and presumptuous designs to which his beloved cousin was exposed by her accession of fortune. He was, in fact, as delicately tenacious touching the conduct pursued by other men towards Miss de Vesci as if she had been a sister of his own.

It was a relief to both parties when the evening, which proved majestically dull in all its arrangements, was over, and the carriages ordered for their return to town; for the bear-leader of the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg, having once secured his long-coveted presentation to the far-famed heiress of Bensleigh, appeared resolved to profit by the

privilege, by preventing the access of all other aspirants to her side.

During their delicious homeward drive — delicious from the balmy quietude of a premature summer evening — Miss de Vesci scarcely opened her lips; — she had, in truth, acquired during the day a thousand unexpected causes of emotion and interest.

CHAPTER VI.

> But woman
> In that dread forfeiture renounceth all! —
> Shame — honour — kindred — offspring — and her right,
> Her *birthright* heritage of fair entreatment
> By all of sterner sex. A fallen woman
> Of all earth's abject things is still the basest! FLETCHER.

CLAUDIA and Eleanor — with that excellent providence of arrangement usually distinguishing young ladies who have danced through a certain number of balls, flirted through a certain number of flirtations, and enlivened by their trifling accomplishments a certain number of Christmas and Easter holydays at a certain number of country houses — had contrived, in the course of their dull festivities at Ebury, to insinuate into the mind of the inert Lady Robert a pressing desire to visit the collection of old masters at the British Gallery on the morrow; and having made their engagement to accompany her within hearing of Lord Basingstoke and Sir Comyne, they were of course pretty well assured that both gentlemen would be in waiting at the door to hand them out of the carriage.

Lord Basingstoke, the eldest son of the Marquis of Lancaster, and owing his sole importance, in the eyes of the Willinghams, to that valuable distinction, was like themselves recently returned from a tolerably long residence on the Continent. For an heir-apparent he was by no means ill-looking or deficient; and like other young men who have run the gauntlet of Eton, Oxford, and the grand tour, and lived in society from the earliest age, he had picked up a sort of colloquial flippancy, a large portion of

cant phrases, and lively allusions, which are apt to pass for wit with those who mix less freely with the world. He was animated, in short, and entertaining; and as, amid the parrot repartees he had taught himself to echo, the greater portion assumed a volatile and even libertine character, he was regarded as one who probably lived and thought and felt as freely as he spoke.

Being thus pretty universally estimated as a mere trifler, the numerous mammas, who were already on the watch to entangle him for their Lady Janes and Lady Sophias — who were wont to offer him a corner of their carriage home after a rainy Almacks, and to force upon his acceptance a card for the ball of "their particular friend Lady Bellamont, who had quite set her heart upon making his acquaintance," — felt themselves free from all danger of his suspecting their motives, or turning with disgust from the detection of their manœuvres. It is astonishing, indeed, with what pertinacity the dowagers of London delude themselves into a persuasion that the *new* young men of the season are blind to their artifices, and ready to fall into the matrimonial pitfall. They forget the freemasonry of the clubs — of the military messes — of the gossip of the Park — revealing from one to another the springes and decoys spread for their captivation. They forget the regular tribe of *pavé* loungers, and guardsmen, and officials, who watch and record the pretensions and failures of successive seasons; who are always ready with their accurate date of Lady Juliana's *début*, and with their malicious recital of all the unsuccessful matrimonial speculations of all the young ladies annually emerging from Medea's caldron, in the tender sweetness of renovated girlhood!

Claudia Willingham was persuaded that Lord Basingstoke felt himself singularly flattered by the graciousness of her smiles; that he attributed them solely to his personal merit; that he was totally unconscious of the charm attached to his future marquisate and its fifty thousand a year; and that, unless Lady Radbourne, who had recently taken it into her roomy head to make him the object of her first attempt for her frightful daughter, should succeed in robbing her of her prey, she had a very posi-

tive chance of becoming Lady Basingstoke before the close of the season.

And what was the reverse of this well-spread and well-dissembled tapestry? What was the true state of Lord Basingstoke's feelings on the subject?—From the time his little lordship had attained his second year, the head nurse of the Lancastrian nursery had been indefatigable in instilling into his mind a sense of his own importance; and long before he had attained the sixth form, his lady-mother, the marchioness, had begun to warn him against the artifices of female cunning likely to arise therefrom, and array themselves against him. On leaving England, for his continental tour, Lord Lancaster had accompanied a very liberal pecuniary provision to his son with the strictest injunctions to be on his guard against the innumerable female adventurers eagerly on the watch at Paris and Rome for the boy-lordlings who parade their cub-inanity through all the various courts of Europe; and scarcely had he returned to London and its wider mart of matrimonial traffic, when his aunt, Lady C., began to caution him against Lady D. and Lady E.;—while one consanguineous dowager ventured "to hint as a friend" that the two Miss Boscawens, who were always enticing him into their mother's opera-box, had been out for at least seven seasons, and were flirts of the most acknowledged publicity; and another presumed on distant relationship to let him know, that Lady Damer had been heard to make very intelligible remarks on the frequency of his lordship's morning visits, and his enthusiastic admiration of her daughter Laura's style upon the harp.

Lord Basingstoke, in fact, in spite of his appearing "*sans armes comme l'innocenee, sans ailes comme la constance,*" was clad in a secret cuirass of proof against the darts and lances of Radbournes, and Willinghams, and of every other fascinating being who smiled upon him from the satin sofas of Willis's rooms. He was selfish enough to accept all their little attentions, and amuse himself with their seemingly artless devotion;—he allowed them to fight for him among themselves with all the rancour of feminine eagerness;—to drive him about—ride with him

—fawn upon him—form dinner-parties for his amusement—and little sentimental nosegays for his delectation. But his vigilant heart was always on the *qui vive* for self-defence; and he was just as likely to fall a victim either to an open attack, or a cunning ambuscade, as the coarse and filthy soil of Hyde Park is likely to throw up a crop of violets or lilies of the valley! Of this, however, Claudia little dreamed, as she smiled upon him from beneath her most becoming hat, and listened applaudingly to his ignorant criticisms upon one of the most graceful productions of Murillo, on which they were gazing together, as a mere apology for *being* together. Basingstoke was very well satisfied that the officer on guard, and two or three members of his club who were swinging the tassels of their canes on the adjoining benches, should perceive with what enamoured delight the fashionable and still lovely Miss Willingham hung upon his accents; and Claudia was equally content that one or two of Lady Radbourne's set, and twice as many of her own, should observe her to be thus publicly attended by a very elegant young man, and one of the best matches in London.

Eleanor, meanwhile, was equally satisfied in listening to Sir Comyne Wallace's languid nothings—comprising a pretty exact repetition of the expressions he had annually uttered to various detachments of "black, brown, or fair," in that very gallery, during the preceding eight or ten years of his life. Every season, indeed, they became somewhat less fervent—every season the pictures he affected to admire produced a feebler impression on his eye, and the damsels to whom he addressed his comments an infinitely feebler impression on his heart. Yet still what could he do better to get rid of himself and his idleness than to lounge before the one, and whisper to the other?—how could he more readily unite the busy vacuity of his club-lounge over the the daily papers, with his park-lounge over the side of some fashionable carriage, than by the *pons asinorum* of an unmeaning flirtation?

At length every exquisite Titian and energetic Vandyke had been discussed in the contemptible jargon of fashionable irony; a thousand silly things had been said and

laughed at by way of wit, and no further communication remained to be sought and accorded, but —

"Shall you be at Almack's early to-night?"

"Certainly! — unless we are detained at Lady Eleanor L.'s."

In another moment they were seated in Lady Robert Lorton's barouche.

"And now that I have done my part in the laborious pleasures of the day," said Lady Robert, addressing herself to both, "you must grant me a favour in return for my chaperonage!"

"Dearest Lady Robert!" exclaimed Claudia and Eleanor in the same breath, "how happy you will make us in an occasion of obliging you."

"You must accompany me to Grosvenor Square, and present me to your cousin Miss Willingham."

"To Grosvenor Square!" exclaimed Claudia.

"To our cousin Mary!" ejaculated Eleanor.

"May I order the servants to proceed there without delay?"

"Certainly — unquestionably — if you desire it; but I cannot imagine — you so strangely surprise me ——"

"You surely cannot be aware," interrupted Eleanor, "with what a decidedly humdrum piece of still life you wish to form an acquaintance?"

"Hear me, and judge of my motives!" replied Lady Robert, gravely. "I had occasion to observe yesterday at Ebury, that a considerable intimacy subsists between Miss de Vesci and Lady Barringhurst; and on questioning your sister on the subject — who by the way is one of the most fascinating and elegant persons with whom I ever conversed — I learnt that their acquaintance commenced years ago at Heddeston Court; that Miss Willingham had in former times been at some pains to bestow a portion of her own accomplishments on the curate's daughter, with a view to their contributing eventually to the support of her family; and that the *ci-devant* Miss Darnham is in fact materially indebted to the kindness and patronage of your cousin Mary."

"I believe Minnie's account of the business has con-

siderably moderated the picture. The Darnhams were actually indebted to my uncle Sir Joseph for their support; and this odious Lady Barringhurst was educated chiefly at his expense."

"I am therefore most anxious to engage your cousin's assistance in counteracting the evil influence of Charlotte Grayfield and of the Duchess of Lisborough over her mind; I want her assistance to thaw the rigid virtue of this promising member of the All-Excellent *caste*."

"But Mary is far more likely to uphold her in her original severity; Mary herself is rich in a double portion of scrupulous purity and prudery."

"Not of a species likely to counteract *my* views, if countenance be any clue to character. Miss Willingham's is angelically mild and feminine; and as I wish to interest her in a work of mercy, I have great reliance upon her co-operation."

"Oh! if you have a sick or destitute family in the Seven Dials to dispose of, you cannot do better for them than bequeath them to the care of Mary Willingham; she would prefer so liberal a gift to a new necklace."

"No, dear Eleanor! mine is a far more pressing interest — yet a far less commendable object of solicitation. I want to engage your cousin's kindness in favour of poor Lucy ——"

"Of the former Lady Barringhurst?"

"Even so."

"I was not aware that you had any further communication with her; surely you do not visit a *divorcée?*"

"*Visit* is scarcely a term to apply to the sick — the dying — the broken-hearted! — I afford her such consolations by my friendship and society as befit her misery and our former intimacy; but, alas! there are no attentions of mine which can obliterate the perpetual irritations of remorse! — there are no soothing words which *I* am capable of breathing that can supersede with a dying mother the voices of her children."

"And is she really dying?" enquired Claudia in compassionate accents. "Poor Lady Barringhurst! how pleasing, and how gentle she was! — I never saw any

person more softly feminine in her manners and habits; — nor could I ever understand by what infatuation she became a prey to so notorious a libertine as Mr. Tichborne."

"Through the influence of evil counsellors, acting upon a mind devoid of sterling Christian principles, Claudia, — a case too common to be much wondered at. Lucy Tichborne was an only and a motherless daughter; and Lord Robert Tichborne, in providing her, on her first appearance in the world, with a handsome equipage and allowance, and procuring her a good opera-box and her subscriptions to Almack's, satisfied himself that he had fully executed every paternal duty. Her cousin, Harry Tichborne, the idlest and most dissipated man about town, was constantly at the house; admitted with equal familiarity to Lucy's confidence, and to Lord Robert's table. But then his uncle knew him to be no marrying man; and fearing nothing for the hand of his daughter, he appears to have regarded her heart and mind as of very small account in the affair."

"You do not mean to say that Lady Barringhurst was attached to her cousin previous to her marriage?"

"That is a point which either of the parties themselves would probably feel puzzled to decide. I can only answer for it, that when Lord Barringhurst — who was a vain, self-sufficient man, solely occupied with himself and with his official duties — applied for Lucy's hand, it was Harry Tichborne to whom the indifference of her father on the occasion induced her to apply for advice."

"It is true that she had no brother, to whom she could refer herself for any particulars of his general character and conduct. And what, after all, were the counsels of so sapient an adviser as Mr. Tichborne?"

"That she should not hesitate to accept a man of his consequence and fortune! —He was well aware that Lord Barringhurst's cold heart and pre-occupied mind would not fail, in a year or two, to leave his young wife to herself ——"

"And to *himself!*"

"Exactly; and the fact proved the justice of his fore-

thought. Tichborne was always at the house, always by Lucy's side, riding with her, dancing and driving in town, or walking with her in the beautiful woods of Wilmount, and playing with her children in the country!"

"I never saw a fonder mother than Lady Barringhurst."

"It was my observation of that very fact which always induced me to trust in her moral safety. She was attached, too, to Lord Barringhurst, although deeply wounded by his indifferent negligence; and I am persuaded that, had he given himself the least trouble to secure her affections, or to watch over her conduct, his tenderness would have served to counteract, in a single day, Mr. Tichborne's manœuvres for previous years."

"Mr. Tichborne was too *brusque* and sensual a person to attach so delicate and gentle a woman, except under very peculiar circumstances."

"He was always by her side, and always under a confidential character of relationship, which disarmed suspicion. But the worst circumstance attending the case was Lucy's intimacy with Mrs. Grandison."

"With the present Lady Wroxton? It certainly was an inconceivable infatuation."

"By no means *inconceivable;*—pernicious, but pernicious only. Mrs. Grandison was one of the most agreeable women in the world, and, in spite of her undisguised sins, warmly cherished by the world; and Lucy very naturally took her in womanly friendship to her bosom, nor discovered her error till she had herself been guilty of every other."

"We were at Paris, I think, when the sad exposure took place."

"I had just left you there. I returned to England in time to witness the public disgrace of a woman whom I sincerely loved; and with the afflicting certainty that had I never left her I might possibly have prevented, and certainly retarded, the progress of her ruin. Poor, poor Lucy!"

"Lord Barringhurst, after his long patient years of calm and wilful blindness, broke out at last, if I remember, with the most extravagant violence."

"He turned Mr. Tichborne out of doors, and committed his wife by the most insulting publicity of reprimand, at a time when she was innocent of every crime but that of gross imprudence. Lucy was wounded and humiliated beyond all conception;—she had no person on whom to rely for advice in such an emergency, nor even for consolation; for Miss Darnham, who was at that time governess to her children, was delegated by Lord Barringhurst to maintain a sort of *espionnage* over her intercourse with them."

"And the consequence proved that in a moment of bitterness she eloped from Wilmount!"

"And that Henry Tichborne was known to have engaged the house in town in which she sought shelter from the shame and mortifications that had been heaped upon her. Every thing, in short, was proved that was necessary to Lord Barringhurst's purpose:—he divorced her within a few months."

"And Mr. Tichborne——"

"Abandoned her!"

"Good heavens! how gross a pitch of ingratitude!"

"*He* pretended otherwise. *He* declared that he felt himself bound by no ties of honour to a woman who had been driven into his arms *solely* by her husband's harshness and perversity."

"A charge which tends, at least, to exonerate *her*. But her friends, her family—did they advance nothing in her defence towards obtaining justice from her seducer?"

"Her father was dead; she had no brother; and that which was every one's business was nobody's! After the scandal of the divorce had been worn threadbare by the gossip of the day, Lucy, and her sins, and her afflictions, were alike forgotten; and she was left to live or die upon the pittance accorded by the law, as suited best with her penitence. If you could but see her as *I* have seen her! deserted—lonely—helpless—hopeless!—and yearning with the bitter agony of a mother's heart for a sight of those beloved children who, in a crisis of desperation, she had been tempted to abandon!"

"Not deserted—not altogether lonely, dearest Lady Robert!—I am persuaded that *your* kindness has never

allowed you to overlook the wretchedness of a repentant sinner! And her friend Lady Wroxton, who is permanently settled in London, surely *she* has afforded every consolation in her power to her miserable victim?"

"Ay, Claudia, and in *vouchsafing* to afford it has filled the envenomed cup of bitterness even to overflowing. Were I now so situated as to be anxious respecting the stability of some married woman's principles of conjugal fidelity — as occurred to me on a former occasion touching this unhappy Lucy herself — it is scarcely so much the abandonment of the world which I would strive to force upon her apprehensions as an unfailing penalty of her crime, as the condescending notice of such of her own sex as have rendered themselves despicable by their frailties, yet escaped, under a cloak of cunning, the censure of the world."

"But surely Lady Wroxton cannot be said to have escaped its censures?"

"She has eluded the branding-iron of divorce, which forms, with so many, the cherub's flaming sword of boundary."

"Through the fatuity of her former husband."

"We all know what Mrs. Grandison was; we all saw it — we all felt it with disgust. No woman could more flagrantly outrage the common decencies of society. But through one of those caprices of destiny, or of the men and women whom we are pleased to call the world, the sentence she had braved failed to overtake her; even as we sometimes trace an intermediary spot which the scorching course of the electric flame has disdained to smite."

"And then her immense wealth secured her the seeming extenuation of a brilliant second marriage."

"Brilliant! — if you could but see the scorn, the humiliating contempt with which she is treated, at times, by Sir Cæsar Wroxton! — nor, if her own evidence is to be believed, does he altogether refrain from violence. Younger than herself by many years, he married her as the easiest mode of settling his gambling debts; — married her with a loathing sense of her own previous dishonour,

which he has not the wisdom or generosity to conceal. Whenever his temper becomes aggravated by excess, he reproaches her with her former stains of character—with the slights still thrown upon her by the disdain of such women as the Duchess of Lisborough and Lady Grayfield;—and even insults her with his comments on those ravages which the approach of age begins to render visible upon her person."

"How unmanly!—what a brutal wretch!"

"Brutal, indeed! for he married her under a full consciousness of all she was, and all she had been; and solely from pecuniary temptations."

"And she avenges every injury she receives from Sir Cæsar upon poor Lucy?"

"Oh no! when she is suffering from similar domestic humiliations, she flies to *her* to unburden her murmurs, and profit by her sympathy. It is in those intervals when Lady Wroxton is triumphant—when she is partially sunned in the favour of the world, and overlooked by her husband's endurance—that her hard heart recovers itself to pour molten torments upon the head of her miserable associate."

"But why does lady—by what name, dear Lady Robert, am I to designate her?"

"Mrs. Tichborne: her *family* name, you know, is the allotment of the law; and one that proves, at times, a cruel remembrancer."

"Why does Mrs. Tichborne allow this mischievous Lady Wroxton to *remain* her associate?"

"Why does the famished wretch appease his pangs with any filthy morsel flung upon his path? We—Eleanor!—*we* who have never known the desolation of solitary hours—of solitary hours, too, imbittered by remorse—can very little imagine the eagerness with which a person who has listened, for days, to the ticking of a clock, or the beating of her own heart, turns to the cheering sound of human voices—to the aspect of a familiar face. But Lady Wroxton is well aware of this; for she has long witnessed and calculated upon the effects of her arrival at Lucy's sordid dwelling: and it is by her accurate

knowledge of her own importance to the degraded sufferer, that she measures her powers of persecution."

"Alas, alas!—for the virtues of our sex!"

"Could you but observe the air of superiority—the air of patronage she assumes with that fallen and penitent creature!—the insulting importance with which she invests the grant of her continued notice."

"Well may you commiserate poor Mrs. Tichborne's destiny!"

"Would, my dear Claudia—would to heaven that Lady Wroxton's insolence were its worst aggravation!—but I have not yet said a single word of the real source of those floods of anguish which are undermining Lucy's existence, and conveying her to her grave—*her children!*"

"There indeed her deprivations are terrible! Of course she has not seen them for years—not since the period of her disgrace?"

"I will not say that she has not *seen* them; for she has followed their footsteps and their equipage through every vicissitude of weather—she has watched for their comings and goings amid beggars at her husband's gate—solely for the torturing delight of looking upon those beloved faces!—Think of such a position!—think of a mother who watched over the infancy of her offspring with all the doting of womanly tenderness—who noted every dawning change—every growing beauty—numbered the very hairs of each little head—and could calculate on every varying feeling of each little heart;—think of a mother so devoted, having condemned herself to gaze trembling with shame upon their alienated countenances, without daring to breathe aloud the accents of tenderness smothering within her breast!"

The tears were pouring down Lady Robert Lorton's cheeks as she spoke; and even the Miss Willinghams were affected by the picture of wretchedness she had drawn.

"It is indeed an awful retribution," observed Eleanor, after a pause.

"I should have told you," resumed Lady Robert in a broken voice,—"I should have told you, but that I trust the charity of your own hearts has suggested it, that Lucy

Tichborne is a sincere penitent;—that it is not the desertion of her lover, nor the scorn of the world, but an inward sense of her crime which has retained her in the humblest seclusion, and preyed upon her health. I do not believe that among the most pharisaical congregations of the godly, there abides so contrite, so true, so pure a Christian! Notwithstanding her profound reliance on the divine sentence of mercy upon the sinner of gospel commemoration, whose frailties resembled her own, she has never presumed to shake from her head the dust and ashes of humiliation. Yet upon this crushed worm do they seek to trample!"

"*They?*—to whom can you possibly allude?"

"To the duchess and her tribe;—to the Grayfields and Barringhursts."

"But what interests have they in common? What contact can afford them an opportunity for insult?"

"I have told you that she is dying;—her very days are numbered;—a deep decline will shortly consign her to the judgment of a more merciful tribunal than any she has yet encountered. For her own miserable part she exults in the coming change, and looks to the grave for that peace beyond all understanding which she has so long forfeited; for mine—I cannot but feel that she has accomplished, and worthily accomplished, her trial, and that the reward of her patience awaits her."

"And is her condition altogether hopeless?"

"So her physicians have pronounced it; and one only earthly care appears to ruffle the composure of her mind. She fancies she could die in the utmost resignation, might she but be permitted for once—for once only, for the last time, and in the presence of witnesses—to speak to her daughters. *She* knows—alas! none better—the dangers by which their path will be beset;—*she* knows the toils and snares which encompass the footsteps of youthful loveliness;—she wishes to warn them of their peril by the acknowledgment of their mother's error—by the spectacle of their mother's anguish;—she seeks but to breathe upon them the intense sighs of a mother's love—and then lie down and die."

"And who—*who* can wish to withhold so blameless a consolation?"

"My dear Eleanor, I have pleaded, besought, nay, almost knelt to Lady Barringhurst for her sanction. At one time I hoped I had prevailed over her rigid sanctity to accord my prayers: but Lady Grayfield interfered, and the young duchess expressed herself with such abhorrent detestation of a sinner of Lucy's caste, that once more she hardened her heart; and they persist in dragging about those gentle-hearted girls to balls, and *fêtes*, and water-parties—in utter ignorance that their wretched mother is on the brink of the grave, and sorrowing in brokenness of heart over their estrangement."

"There is something naturally pensive in their air and countenance; lovely as they are, the Miss Barringhursts do not appear happy."

"How should they? Ever since their father's re-marriage, Lady Barringhurst's daily lessons of propriety have been exemplified by references to their poor mother's disgrace; they are perpetually reminded that the ill opinion of the world has been fastened upon their name by Lucy's misconduct; and that it is equally their duty to detest and despise the woman whom they remember only as ministering to all their youthful pleasures, smoothing their little pillows in sickness, and comforting them under Miss Darnham's severity;—and, by the most chilling severity of demeanour, to display to the world their own moral superiority."

"Poor girls! Lady Barringhurst does not appear to be of a very conciliatory disposition."

"I am less indignant against *her*, however, than against Charlotte and Anastasia; for *her* situation is one of great delicacy, while *their* interference is wholly uncalled for. The whole three pass their Sunday mornings in running after fashionable preachers at the Lock or Hatton Garden, and their Sunday evenings at some concert or *conversazione*; yet, when I venture to resume this afflicting subject, pleading the cause of the fallen and the penitent, they put on their staunchest airs of orthodoxy—overwhelm me with texts—and tell me that the Miss Barringhursts cannot touch pitch without being defiled! As if

contagion could exist in the bitter tears of a contrite sinner — of a dying mother!"

The sympathy expressed by the Miss Willinghams was now arrested by their arrival in Grosvenor Square, and by the formalities of introduction necessary between Mary and Lady Robert Lorton.

CHAPTER VII.

> But loveliest things have mercy shown
> To every frailty but their own,
> And every woe a tear can claim
> Except an erring sister's shame. SCOTT.

To the great surprise of the Miss Willinghams, they found their sister established in the drawing-room in Grosvenor Square, and apparently engaged in confidential and affectionate intercourse with Mary. They had long and satisfactorily marked the disunion existing between the two; and had been very little inclined to see a better understanding prevail: for notwithstanding the improvement which they acknowledged to be visible in the air and address of Sir Joseph's daughter, she was still simply and chastely elegant, without aspiring to those distinctions of fashion which they were ambitious to render the portion of Miss de Vesci; and, moreover, she was still, as she had ever been, what they were pleased to term *"too good"* for the ordinary style of society in the London world.

While Lady Robert, therefore, was engaged in breaking the ice of Mary's natural reserve, and in attempting to interest her in the history and hopes of the dying Lucy, Claudia and Eleanor busied themselves with labouring to discover the motive of their sister's unpremeditated visit to Grosvenor Square.

"When we left home, Minnie, I understood from mamma that you intended refreshing yourself, after your Ebury fatigues, by a quiet morning with her. How came you to change your mind? Was Lady Maria afflicted with a fit of nervousness — or rheumatism — or ill hu-

mour? — either of which contingences suffices to render even the boudoir in Portman Square a Hall of Eblis!"

"Mamma was in her usual health and spirits, but *I* was not; — it was my own ill humour which drove me forth to seek consolation from my cousin Mary."

"And you appear to have found it; for I can discover no present trace of affliction upon your countenance."

"Oh, I was not afflicted — only cross. That very impertinent Monsieur de Béthizy, in spite of the porter's denial, thought proper to force himself upon us for a morning visit; and having made good his entry, with a most officious affectation of anxiety to enquire after our health, he saw your guitar lying on the music-rack; and without informing himself whether we were tunefully inclined — which I, for one of the party, certainly was not — he favoured us with aria after aria, romance after romance, in hopes, I suppose, by giving us excess of this food of love, that

Surfeiting,
The appetite might sicken, and so die."

"And did he appear a good musician?"

"An exquisite one! — his performance was as excellent as it was inopportune."

"This is a new conquest of yours, Minnie. Monsieur de Béthizy has certainly fallen desperately in love with you."

"So he took some pains to make me understand and believe. But I was forewarned against his pretensions: I was apprised that '*les beaux yeux de ma cassette*' would prove very attractive in his; and I was therefore proof against his elegant flatteries, which I must needs acknowledge to have been very well turned."

"Oh, this *menteur véridique* is an extremely plausible and pleasant person; well-bred, and original, and accomplished: it is really a pity that he cannot afford to be sincere in his attachments; — but then there is nothing you know so ruinously expensive as disinterested love."

"It is perhaps easy to be candid with regard to Monsieur de Béthizy's merits, and to beware of his cupidity, when it addresses itself to other people. But had you been in *my* place — had you found yourself exposed to his

vexatious attempts — you, too, would have waxed wroth against his intrusion. In short, finding that he had established himself with us for the remainder of the morning, I ordered the carriage with as ungracious an air as I could assume, and came hither."

"And have you learned any thing from Mary," enquired Eleanor with a very significant look, "concerning the poor Lorimers, and their affairs? — She is so much in Lady Wyndham's confidence, and so much attached to that dear old stay-at-home tortoise, Lady Lorimer, that she is probably *au fait* to all their politics."

"What politics can agitate a family which had just been bereaved of its father and protector? — Lord Lorimer was very far from an interesting or an amiable member of society; but his kind good wife will not the less lament the companion of her long and enduring existence."

"And the present Lord Lorimer — is he shortly expected home?" enquired Eleanor, looking somewhat ashamed of her own flippancy.

"My cousin Charles has written to require his immediate return to England; more — neither his family, nor Mary, nor myself, can know or guess upon the subject. And you, sisters, have you had a pleasant morning?"

"Delightful! the gallery was not too crowded — but several of our intimate friends accidentally joined our party."

"We have been so gay ——" Claudia began, but her words were checked by the sound of sobs from the extremity of the room where Mary and Lady Robert Lorton had been sitting engrossed in earnest conversation.

On the entrance of her visiters Mary Willingham had been very ill prepared for any painful appeal to her feelings. She had received, during the preceding hour, from Miss de Vesci, intelligence which had flushed her pensive cheek with joy, and irradiated her mild blue eyes with a very unusual air of triumph. She had been clasped in the arms of her own dear Minnie — her former nursling — her former pupil — her future friend — with a degree of fervent affection such as had long ceased to be demonstrated be-

tween them; and which now owed its renewal or acknowledgment to explanations not the less welcome or the less precious that they arose from accidental causes. It was some time since Mary had felt so happy, so much in accord with the world, so charitably inclined to believe that it contained a large majority of the happy and the good; when, just at this auspicious crisis of her universal philanthropy, Lady Robert Lorton's recital of sorrow, and suffering, and human severity, burst upon her heart with an obscuring train of clouds and storms. She could not choose but weep—even in the struggle between the sense of her personal happiness and of the agonising repentance of the dying Lady Barringhurst.

Miss de Vesci rose, on the first sound of her distressing emotion, and would have advanced towards her.

"Leave her to herself, Minnie," observed Eleanor, placing a detaining hand on her arm. "Nothing particular has occurred; Mary is only good-naturedly agitated by a sad history which Lady Robert has been recounting."

But Miss de Vesci was inclined to follow the prompting of her own heart, rather than that of her sister's ceremonious good-breeding; in a moment she was by Mary's side;—in another, she was folded in her arms. While her sisters affected to busy themselves with a frame of beautiful embroidery which was standing on an adjoining table in evidence of their cousin's industrious morning, Miss de Vesci was admitted to her share of Lady Robert's amiable anxieties, and of Mary's sympathy.

But Mary Willingham did not limit that sympathy to a mere indulgence of verbal exaggeration. She undertook to visit Lady Barringhurst, with whom she still remained on terms of friendly intimacy, that very evening; she undertook to plead and to persuade with patient eloquence; but more she could not promise; she acknowledged her friend Milicent to be one of the gnat-strainers of the earth.

"I do not remember that she was formerly so strictly severe in her doctrines," observed Miss Willingham; "but I fancy she feels called upon, by the peculiar circumstances attending her elevation, to practise and display a more than ordinary portion of rigid virtue."

"Say rather of spiritual pride," interrupted Minnie de Vesci. "Milicent was always vain, and cold, and heartless: well do I recollect, dearest Mary, with what reluctance of self-love she used to receive those instructions of yours which she knew were essential to her power of gaining her daily bread, and that of her parents. And now—finding herself inferior to such persons as Lady Robert, and Lady Rachel Verney, and Lady Cosmo Somerset, in birth, beauty, and accomplishments—she attempts to assume and maintain a supereminence over their heads by affecting this unchristian pride of holiness."

"Minnie, Minnie!" exclaimed her cousin, in a tone of reprehension.

Lady Robert smiled. "I fear Miss de Vesci's strictures are no less just than severe."

"Possibly—but so strict a measure of justice entails a terrible responsibility on ourselves; we are told that 'with that measure we mete, it shall be measured to us withal.'"

"I will allow *you*," said Lady Robert, kindly taking her hand, "to reprove me by a text; for yours is a womanly and a Christian heart—as humble as it is tender. I have not, however, yet replied to your amiable proposal of accompanying me to the house of mourning."

"And mine, dear Lady Robert," whispered Miss de Vesci;—"will you not include me in a work of mercy?"

"I will include neither of you, on this occasion," said Lady Robert Lorton, smiling upon them both. "You—unmarried, and young, and pure in name and fame—might be injured were the world to know of your contact with one of the victims, poisoned even unto death by its pestilent and infectious breath;—nor has Lucy any claims upon *you* to warrant the hazard. You are not the children of her bosom, and therefore cannot impart the balm that wounded bosom needs so much;—*you* have not been her friend—her companion in the paths of levity and folly, as *I* have; and you are not called upon to expiate any former deficiency of friendly warning and admonition as *I* am. No, no! go to Lady Barringhurst!—prevail with *her*—induce her to obtain her lord's sanction to my plan. Vouch-

safe to my unhappy Lucy the consolation of blessing her daughters before she dies, and *I* will bless *you* for your generous interposition."

All further discussion of the subject was now prevented by the entrance of Mr. Willingham — who, seeing Miss de Vesci's carriage at the door, had been induced to intrude among his sister's morning-visiters; a circumstance of rare occurrence with one of such busy occupations, and so reserved a disposition. He appeared surprised by the traces of emotion still visible on the countenances of Lady Robert and her young friends; but having been engaged himself, during the whole of the morning, in the melancholy task of assisting his neighbour, Sir William Wyndham, in a temporary arrangement of the affairs of the late Lord Lorimer, he referred the sadness of their air to their sympathy with his widow; with whom they were on terms of intimate friendship, and who was a woman commanding the general respect and affection of all within the limited circle of her acquaintance.

Claudia and Eleanor, however, who had long accustomed themselves to regard any outward demonstration of affliction as a gross act of moral indecorum, were shocked that Lady Robert should be detected with red eyes, or Minnie with quivering lips. They officiously interrupted Charles Willingham's approach towards the depressed group, by assailing him with a thousand idle questions, and ironical compliments; and while he was still parrying the attack with equal good humour and good breeding, Sir Joseph himself ceremoniously bowed his way into the room.

With the usual frivolity of idle curiosity distinguishing his puerile turn of mind; — for his enrolment in the Royal Societies and Institutions — Linnæan, and Horticultural, and Zoological — Antiquarian, and Geological, and Phrenological — had tended only to knit his reverend brows into sterner gravity, without assisting to furnish the vacant chambers beneath — had prompted him to ascertain that his nieces were in the drawing-room, as a motive for the unusual exertion of his son's appearance there; and he had immediately resolved to acquaint himself by ocular certainty, which of the three fair cousins had formed an attraction to

Mr. Willingham's assiduities. He was provoked beyond measure, on finding him smiled upon by the handsome Claudia, and engaged in lively repartee with the animated Eleanor; while Miss de Vesci — the heiress — who could, would, should, or might have been from her very cradle his own especial property, was standing aloof, hand in hand with Mary, at the further extremity of the room!

On this point, indeed, Sir Joseph Willingham was sensitively conscious of having defeated himself; and, like other persons sore under the recollection of a blunder, he took refuge under a self-assurance of ill usage. He chose to feel that he had been defrauded out of Bensleigh Park, and ten thousand a year for his son; first, by the lawless interposition of Lord Stapylford, and, lastly, by the unwarrantable interference of Mr. Lorimer; and having now no better source of sympathy for his disappointment, he frequently sought to disengage his leathern heart of its store of bitterness, by discussing with poor, palsied old Lady Monteagle, his ancient neighbour and ally, the rapacity of the Lorimer family, and the inexplicable mysteries attending the position of Miss de Vesci's affairs.

From a cabinet-council of this description, he had just returned in time to increase the dissatisfaction it had engendered, by the spectacle of an apparent intimacy between his portionless elder nieces and his promising son; and all the dowager's malevolent suggestions touching the ingratitude of Lady Maria Willingham, and the successful manœuvres of that crafty tribe — those thriving Lorimers — were as nothing compared with the horrible attestation before him of a new conspiracy hatching against his peace. He was scarcely mollified by the graciousness with which Lady Robert Lorton solicited an introduction; he entertained, it is true, a most inordinate degree of respect towards a duchess presumptive; but his son — his only son! He trembled to think of Charles's danger; and did not entirely recover his self-possession till the equipage containing the three fatal sisters — whom he began to regard as Mr. Willingham's destinies — rolled from the door. Even then his equanimity was of a very doubtful character; he was exceedingly glad to have disencumbered himself of temp-

tresses so perilous to the future welfare of his family; but he could not resist the promptings of his vexation with sufficient fortitude to refrain from tormenting his son and daughter, during the whole of dinner-time, with diatribes against the rapacity of the Lorimers, and the affectation, folly, and insincerity of Lady Maria and her united offspring. And if Charles and Mary were too devotedly respectful in filial deference to take up the vindication of their absent friends, they were unrewarded by the slightest measure of compunctious forbearance on the part of the indignant Sir Joseph.

The Miss Willinghams and Minnie, meanwhile, on their return to Portman Square — wholly unconscious of the vituperation thus lavished upon them — were destined to hear of another morning visiter, equally unexpected and scarcely more welcome than the importunate Monsieur de Béthizy. Lady Radbourne had been sitting with their mother in all the friendly cordiality of extreme intimacy; but, although she had a scapegrace son at full years of *in*-discretion, and already sinking beneath the ponderous honours of a cornet's helmet, neither Claudia nor Eleanor were tempted to attribute her dawning graciousness to any matrimonial views upon the heiress of Bensleigh. They were far better inclined to believe and fear that she was eager to ascertain the exact state and progress of their connection with Lord Basingstoke, against whom she evidently purposed directing her harpoon in favour of her own daughter; as well as to weaken the strength of that by which they were bound to Lady Robert Lorton and her society.

Lady Radbourne was, in fact, most tenaciously covetous of attaching to her train every person likely to attract the notice and favour of the great world. But even this absorbent avarice of partisanship was feeble by comparison with the intensity of her eagerness to thwart, and mortify, and torment Lady Robert Lorton — the only person who had ventured to oppose her own tortuous and clumsy march towards popularity. It was Lady Radbourne who secretly, but unintermittingly, stirred up the the dregs of bitterness subsisting between the duchess and Lady Grayfield, and

their unsuspecting sister-in-law; she it was who—by a dexterous support of Mr. Tichborne in society—by constant insinuations of the serious injury it had proved to so young a man to become entangled by Lady Barringhurst's licentious arts—contrived to refresh the odium shed over the character and conduct of the degraded Lucy;—she it was who strengthened the perverse righteousness of the virtuous Milicent into all its obstinacy of cruelty;—and now her projects and malicious forecast were finally directed towards ensuring the defection of the Willingham family, whom she intended to cajole into withdrawing their friendship from the detested Lady Robert; while she slily robbed them, in her turn, of the devotion of Lord Basingstoke. Lady Radbourne dearly loved a stratagem; and this double intrigue gave a poignant zest to the graciousness of her attack upon the politeness of Lady Maria Willingham.

Both in her ladyship and in her elder daughters, however, Lady Radbourne was destined to encounter a gift of worldly subtlety equal to her own;—the Willinghams were not of the number of those whom the serpent could beguile!—They were satisfied to accept the invitations of the new Empress of the West—to eat her dinners, dance at her balls, flirt with her son, or affect a sentimental friendship for her vapid daughters. But they maintained their own reserve of cunning throughout the whole affair;—and whatsoever queen might reign—whether Lady Radbourne or Lady Robert—Claudia was as stoutly determined as the vicar of Bray to retain her self-appropriated honours as the future Marchioness of Lancaster.

CHAPTER VIII.

> For marriage is a matter of more worth
> Than to be dealt with by attorneyship. SHAKSPEARE.

MONSIEUR DE BÉTHIZY had been perfectly conscious of the motives of Miss de Vesci's ungracious reception of his visit; but it was not his cue to take umbrage at this early

discouragement. He was well aware of the difference existing between the matrimonial arrangements of England and France. He was well aware that instead of sending his mother, the countess—or his aunt, the duchess—as an ambassadress to Lady Maria Willingham, in order to display his hereditary parchments, the rent-roll of his estates, and—after requiring a view of Miss de Vesci's in return—to bargain and wrangle touching the value of the diamonds to be presented, and the amount of pin-money to be apportioned to the bride—he should be required to waste his valuable time and address upon all the delicacies of circumlocution; to endure a thousand caprices—and devote, for the first time in his life, to a young lady, those *petits soins* and eager attentions, which had been, for many years, at the service of every married woman of distinction in the Chaussée d'Antin.

All this unnecessary labour of courtship he regarded as extremely importunate, and somewhat indelicate—as a work of supererogation in every possible point of view. But Béthizy was a well-bred man, and piqued himself upon an intimate version in *les usages* of every country in which he condescended to sojourn. England he knew to be remarkable for the length and solemnity of its antenuptial wooings; and as an heiress must necessarily be entitled to a double portion of such distinctions, he resolved to lend himself, with a good grace, to the sentimental mummery exacted by national custom. Indeed, from the moment of his actual introduction to Miss de Vesci—from the moment he had found occasion to recognise her extreme loveliness, and unexpected elegance of air and address—he had felt his forthcoming task to be far less irksome than he had at first apprehended. He still regretted that one of her elder sisters, who were so much her superiors in tact and knowledge of the world, had not proved the heiress, instead of herself; but still he felt that he should not be *very* much ashamed of producing Minnie at Paris as Madame la Comtesse de Béthizy. If less *distinguée* by fashionable effrontery than he could wish, the guineas of her dowry would serve to gild over a multitude of sins.

With respect to eventual acceptance, he never, for a

moment, entertained a doubt upon the subject. He had been too much flattered by the world—too successful among the fairer moiety of its communities—to be at all uncertain as to the extent of his own powers of pleasing. He had his intervals of *maussaderie* and *brusquerie*, could be out of humour, and out of spirits, like other men; but when and where he deigned to lend himself seriously to the task of captivation, his success was unlimited. As to Miss de Vesci—*pauvre petite!*—he intended to be very indulgent and forbearing towards one so little versed in the habits of good society; he would grant her till the end of the season to make the most of her power, and plume herself on her liberty, but after July, the time for trifling would be at an end; and she must prepare herself to resign the sceptre, and accompany him back to Paris.

If Charles Willingham could have been aware of the extent of his views, or have listened to the overflowings of his impertinence, it is probable that a brace of hair-triggers and Chalk Farm would have put a conclusive period to his speculations. But Béthizy had too much tact not to display a perfect discretion in the selection of his audience. He sometimes condescended to electrify Lady Radbourne with a disclosure of his views and principles; for he saw that this foolish *devotée* of fashion was wonderfully fascinated by his cool, easy affectation of general superiority; and was eager to receive his dictatorial opinions as the true oracles of the false altar she adored; and he was on terms of affectionate intimacy with Henry Tichborne, who, although ejected from Lady Robert Lorton's society, and frowned upon by the Lisboroughs and Grayfields, was still of high account among the general circles of the great world;—an important personage at all the fashionable clubs—an idol at Crockford's, and an autocrat at Newmarket. From Tichborne, indeed, Monsieur de Béthizy had received his first valuable intelligence respecting Miss de Vesci and her appertainments; and the crafty heir-leech was the more eager in urging him to the pursuit, inasmuch as an old *salon* account still remained unsettled between them, which he trusted would be adjusted *unexamined* amid the lavish hurry of a brilliant match with an English heiress.

"But my dear fellow," said Béthizy to his congenial friend, as he sat lounging on the sofa of Tichborne's superfection of a bachelor's residence in one of the most recondite by-ways of classical May Fair, "surely there are more forms to be observed in this laborious undertaking than you have yet explained? To call every morning in Portman Square—(having bribed the porter to become oblivious of any prohibitory admonition of 'not at home')—to sit making conversation or love, according to the number of persons who may chance to be in the room, till the carriage or the horses are announced—to beset Miss de Vesci's barouche in Park Lane with one of Colvill's choicest *bouquets*—to devote myself to Lady Maria and her *petite santé*, while her elder daughters are flirting and waltzing at their eternal balls—and to persuade poor little Minnie herself on the morrow that I have been standing with folded arms and rueful visage all night under her window, instead of supping at Crockford's—pray tell me—is this *all* I have to do?"

"And enough too, I should imagine," replied Tichborne, laughing at his vehemence; "when you include the necessity of riding the best and the best-groomed horse—wearing the best-made coat—smiling your most pearly smiles, and uttering your choicest witticisms, in order to maintain your reputation among the fashionable powers that be—and to overcome this pretty little country girl by 'the magic of a name.'"

"It is precisely because she *is* pretty that my chivalrous gallantry suggests an excess of effort. Had she been as ugly as Hecate, I should have married her all the same; but with less *gaité de cœur*, and leaving all the labour of courtship to herself."

"Are you acquainted with her guardians?"

"I knew Lorimer at Paris;—an excellent fellow—not good-looking, but really deserving to be so. *Du reste bon enfant!*"

"But there is another; a Sir Westland Somebody—or Sir Somebody Westland;—one of our commercial upstarts—as rich as the Bank, and as vulgar as Oxford Street."

"My dear Tichborne!—prithee present me. I adore

a brute who is both vulgar and opulent; any qualification which enables one to despise a rich man ensures one such a delicious personal triumph! Pray present me!"

"*Entre nous*, my dear Béthizy, I have very little vogue or currency myself among persons of the Westland stamp:—they have an instinctive detestation of younger brothers, and men with no better profession than that of gentlemanly leisure."

Béthizy adjusted his cravat, knit his brows, and seemed uneasy.

"I once fell in with Sir Robert Westland in the course of a money-lending transaction of Vallerhurst's or Stapylford's—I forget which. *We* intended to over-reach Square-toes, but found ourselves no match for his extortionary foresight. I remember he said some ugly things to us, which I endured far better than the consciousness of having been regularly *done* by a fellow in corduroys and top-boots; but as the old usurer probably remembers the transaction as well as I do, an introduction from *me* would only hurt your cause."

"I must get some one else to officiate as master of the ceremonies. *Voyons!*"

"*Voyons* indeed!—You have no conception of the difficulty of getting into those monied, dinner-giving, regular houses! All one's acquaintance are acquainted with Prince A. or the Duke of B.—Almack's and Parliament have their definitive and well-understood modes of entrance; but who the deuce knows any thing about a parcel of ledgermen in Broad Street or Great St. Helen's?—unless, as in the present instance, one of them chances to boast the guardianship of a lovely heiress."

"That word renews my flagging enthusiasm! By the way, that old general officer, with a padded chest and long-tailed pony, with whom Comyne Wallace is so fond of trotting round the drive—is not he a Sir Westland?"

"Your very man!—a stupid old block of *levée* lumber, who will do your business to a turn! Wallace will present you;—a 'Monsieur le Comte' will put him in mind of the Peninsula—he will tell you a tough story or two about Almeida or Badajoz; by listening to which you will

obtain an easy access to the house of his brother, or cousin, or nephew — the identical guardian of Miss de Vesci."

Mr. Tichborne's assurances were on this occasion prophetic; and so well did Monsieur de Béthizy bait his peninsular trap for poor Sir Hew Westland, by enquiring whether he were "the distinguished General Westland, of whom he had heard such frequent mention from his cousin the Duc d'Albufera," that within a week from his presentation he found himself an invited guest in the vast mansion of the vast Sir Thomas, in the vast area of Portland Place! — an honour to which his original introductor, Sir Comyne Wallace, had never either aspired or been admitted.

But while Monsieur de Béthizy was congratulating himself upon his expert diplomacy, and preparing his toilet for a dinner-party, at which he had pre-assured himself of Miss de Vesci's presence — with all that elaboration of mother-of-pearl and gold — of *esprits, extraits, élixirs odonthalgiques, pâtes,* and *sachets,* which had given to his dressing-box the reputation of being "*le nécessaire le mieux provissionné de l'Europe!*" — he had very little idea that he was himself the dupe of a manœuvre on the occasion. The Westlands were, perhaps, of all the persons interested in the state of the young heiress's engagements and affections, the most *profoundly* interested; for their own stake in the chance of her future union with Lord Stapylford actually amounted to the solid sum of 80,000*l.* sterling. Yet they were also the most remote from every reasonable possibility of calculating upon the event; with all her graciousness and gentle affability she entertained so little real familiarity with the several ladies of the family, that it would have been utterly beyond their powers of daring to make a direct attack upon her confidence.

Now the whole tribe of Westland were aware — Sir Hew having triumphantly proclaimed the fact, which the young Parisian was far from dilatory in confirming — that Monsieur de Béthizy was an intimate acquaintance of Miss de Vesci's, and a frequent morning visiter in Portman Square. It occurred to them, for they were not very accurately versed in the nationalities of foreign titles, that he

was an old Neapolitan friend; and that he might possibly have made himself master, by personal observation, of the secret they were so anxious to appropriate. Their object, therefore, in inviting him to dinner was a settled purpose of cross-examination during the intervals of their sour claret; and while his own intentions had arranged a premature escape to the ladies and the coffee, theirs had concocted a project "to put an enemy into his mouth to steal away his brains;" and, during their absence, to pry into the mysteries of the young heiress's affections!

Great, indeed, was Miss de Vesci's astonishment, on witnessing Monsieur de Béthizy's affectedly easy entrance into the dining-room in Portland Place, towards the conclusion of the first course; but she had now been so repeatedly startled by his appearance in her own house, in spite of her prohibitions, and on occasions and at hours the most incongruous, that she began to regard him as a sort of inevitable Mephistopheles attached to her steps; or rather, for there was very little that was either tragical or repulsive in his frank air and handsome person, as the Monsieur Nongtonpaw universally greeting the appearance of "the great traveller, Bull."

Having heard so much from her sisters of the fastidiousness of Parisian judgment respecting the customs, dress, diet, and demeanour of the Hottentots of Great Britain, Minnie, who had a great aptitude for being amused, promised herself some diversion in watching the effect of the society gathered around her upon the susceptible nerves of Monsieur de Béthizy;—she expected to see his politeness cruelly taxed in disguising his astonishment. But in this anticipation she was utterly disappointed. By far the most offensive and most ill-bred class of English mediocrities is to be met with in the *cafés* of Paris, and the arcades of the Palais Royal; their own countrymen, indeed, would feel puzzled to assign a character and degree to their coarse and insolent vulgarity. Monsieur de Béthizy had "supped full of horrors" of this description; and having always heard them defined by the exclusives as belonging to the commercial class, his own surprise at Sir Thomas Westland's table arose from seeing an assembly of

civilised beings, who neither drank their champagne out of tumblers, nor accompanied all their observations with an oath. By comparison with his anticipations, he thought them remarkably well-bred, agreeable persons; most of them, in virtue of their foreign mercantile associations, speaking remarkably good French, and all apparently courteously disposed towards the man on whose incontinence of tongue their foresight had calculated so largely. A certain joviality in their manners reminded him, too, of the lightheartedness of his own countrymen: his limited acquaintance with the English language prevented his perceiving that this super-animation was "full of sound and laughter—signifying nothing!"—and essentially different from the witty piquancy of foreign gaiety.

There was another circumstance which operated upon Monsieur de Béthizy's prejudices in their favour, far beyond Minnie's conceptions. There was a comfortable air of opulence—a general evidence of plenty shed around the establishment—which is peculiarly prepossessing to a Frenchman of narrow or embarrassed fortunes. The profusion of plate and other rich accessories, the blaze of lights, the train of liveried attendants, the inordinate display of diamonds affected by the female guests, and the vast variety of rich wines produced upon the board, struck him with feelings of general respect towards the Westland family, and more than compensated for any deficiency of refinement visible in their arrangements. He even began to think less deferentially of Minnie and of her fortunes in the midst of so much splendour; he was persuaded that the clan by which he was now surrounded could furnish half a dozen heiresses for his selection; heiresses, too, upon whom the name of *comtesse* would operate as a far more prepossessing charm than upon the daughter of Lady Maria Willingham. His worthy host—among the rest—could boast a Miss Arabella of his own, who had only one vulgar, red-handed, black-haired, dressy, noisy brother, to share with her the rich proceeds of his establishment in Lombard Street, and the importance of his city position as an East India Director.

It is surprising to observe the superfluous pains with

which the mole-eyed mortals of the earth labour towards the accomplishment of an end which courts them, ready manufactured by the common chances of society. In this latter capacity of India director, Sir Robert Westland was in unregarded possession of sources of information, which might have aptly superseded all his designs upon Monsieur de Béthizy, and all his misdoubtings touching the eventual distribution of General de Vesci's property. Nearly opposite to Minnie, at the gorgeous board, and only severed from her observation by the glittering arabesques of an epergne, apparently framed for the aërial elevation of mangoes, limes, pickled ginger, and other Oriental condiments, there sat a middle-aged gentleman, with a visage as yellow as the ginger, and as sour as the mangoes; — with wasted hands half covered by a singular prolongation of Irish linen! — a meagre head, scantily shaded with lank, unwholesome hair; — smelling pungently of camphor, and looking as though the bilious vital stream oozed rather than circulated through his languid veins.

Miss de Vesci, to whom all these external evidences had been rendered familiar by her residence in the mansion of her uncle, the ex-governor, instantly recognised one of the latest human consignments of the East India fleet! Long before she had caught the sound of "Presidency" — "Governor-general" — "Council" — "Hookahbadar" — — "Bungalow" — "Kedegree" — "Tiffin" — "Elephanteradabad" — and "eighteen hundred miles up the country" — she had decided her opposite neighbour to have left the Downs the preceding day, and the Hooghly some four or five months. From that moment Monsieur de Béthizy, on her right hand, uttered his pleasantries in vain; and her heavy pompous guardian, on her left, enquired three times unanswered, whether she had been "*riding* in the carriage all the morning?" and whether he should "help her to some *sparrow-gras?*"

Sir Richard, at length waxing wroth at her silence, decided that she was pre-engrossed by that chattering, jabbering, mountebank of a Frenchman on the other side; and the mountebank of a Frenchman decided, at the same time, that she was afflicted by an heiress-fit of caprice; but

neither of them conjectured that eye, and ear, and heart were anchored upon the yellow, semi-existent Nabob, who was bestowing his Oriental intelligence on the careless ears of Miss Arabella Westland.

The East India director, indeed, who was arithmetically versed in the merits of his jaundiced guest, had purposely ensured this auspicious propinquity to his own daughter; whose full-blown charms, and raiment of divers colours, might, he conceived, operate favourably upon one whose observation had been recently confined to the swarthy visages of Lascars, and the listless languor of the Calcutta belles. He had very little suspicion how much Miss Belle herself would have preferred the neighbourhood of Béthizy's laughing eyes, and sapphire studs; or how infinitely delighted the heiress of Bensleigh would have found herself, by an occasion of enquiry into all the *on dits* of the Eastern world! — She listened, however, with untiring patience even to the remote echoes of Mr. Muddiford's eloquence; being satisfied, by former experience, that instead of attempting to acquaint himself with any of the important changes and public events of recent occurrence in Europe, the yellow Nabob would continue to recount and re-recount the inane and uninteresting events of a quarter of the world in which no person present but himself was likely to be interested.

At length her philosophic and long suffering patience was rewarded; — the names of Lord and Lady Melrose — and of Lord Stapylford — greeted her ears. Connected with what extraneous information, or tending to what elucidations, I shall not take upon me to say; having no reason to suppose they would prove of higher account in the estimation of the public in general than in that of Miss Arabella Westland; who most unforbearingly jingled her ice-spoon throughout the whole communication, and deigned not to bestow upon its prosy minister a single moment's attention.

On Minnie de Vesci, however, the effect was instantaneous — entrancing — bewildering! Whatever the character of the intelligence thus involving the name of her lover, it brought a flash of rapture to her cheek; and to her eyes

a stream of radiant emanations. From that moment Monsieur de Béthizy persuaded him that the "heiress-fit of caprice" had turned the current of its tide—and all in his own favour. The fair lady of Bensleigh, in the excitement of her joy, was as ready to laugh with him—to flirt, or dance, or sing—as either of her sisters, or any of the Westland young ladies.

In the course of the evening the stock of Sir Robert Westland's calculations on the Stapylford marriage-forfeiture had fallen two and a half per cent. on the strength of a French romance, sung in parts with excellent skill and feeling, by Miss de Vesci and Monsieur de Béthizy!

CHAPTER IX.

Go! let me weep—there 's bliss in tears
When he who sheds them inly feels
Each lingering stain of early years
Effaced by every drop that steals.

The fruitless showers of earthly woe
Fall dark to earth, and never rise,
While tears that from repentance flow
In bright exhalement reach the skies. MOORE.

It was on one of those balmiest summer days when sorrow appears to have forsaken her habitation upon the earth; when fruits and flowers, scattered in lavish prodigality around, seem to renew the season in which heaven first showered its bountiful gifts upon the graceless rebels of its creation;—when the very air we breathe is preciously endowed—and the sky on which we gaze is brightly enriched with resplendent promises of happiness—that Lady Robert Lorton dejectedly ascended the narrow staircase of an obscure retreat in the neighbourhood of Kensington—entered a darkened chamber—and seated herself beside a sofa, on which reclined the wasted and languid figure of the once lovely Lady Barringhurst.

"What a beautiful morning!—did you come direct from home?" enquired Lucy, extending her attenuated hand towards her visiter, and bending upon her face one

of those eager looks of sickly anxiety which Lady Robert could but too well interpret.

"I did!" she replied; for she had no courage to reply to the *mute* interrogation of the sufferer.

"I thought the loveliness of the weather might perhaps tempt you to drive through the King's Road—or ——"

"I walked through Kensington Gardens, my dear Lucy, with my children; and the carriage met me at the Palace gate."

"Ah, then I see how it is!" said the invalid, clasping her hands mournfully together. "You have failed in your application; if you had any good news to communicate, you would not have delayed on the road."

"My dear Lucy—my dearest friend——"

"No, no!—I know the kindness of your disposition too well to deceive myself. My last chance is over, or you would have flown instantly hither to bring me the glad tidings of peace."

"I will own to you that I have prospered ill with Lady Grayfield and Anastasia;—that they are rather inclined to strengthen Lady Barringhurst's obduracy than to forward our views. Still I do not despair; I have ensured the assistance of a person both able and willing to serve you—of one whose influence with this harsh woman has its origin in important obligations."

Lucy waved her head despairingly.

"But I have another source of consolation to offer you;—I have seen your girls—have conversed with them."

The invalid half raised herself from her pillow, and without pronouncing a syllable, fixed the grasp of her long thin hand on Lady Robert's arm, and the piteous gaze of her eager eyes upon Lady Robert's countenance.

"They are charming!—gentle, graceful, and unspeakably feminine in their address. There is a sort of mournful charm about them; as if the impulses of youth prompted them to be gay and happy, while the remembrance of their mother saddened them into calmness."

"My Lucy—my own sweet Lucy!"—said the

agitated mother. "Does she then remember me so tenderly?"

"She does! I am persuaded she does! For although the scene of my introduction to them at Ebury was too public to allow me to venture upon any agitating explanation, yet your eldest girl found an opportunity to whisper to me when a turn of the shrubbery concealed us for a moment from the observation of Lady Grayfield and her *protégée*, 'You are very kind, Lady Robert, thus to seek our acquaintance; the notice of no other person could have flattered us half so much. My sister and myself have not forgotten the happy period of our childhood, nor your frequent presence in the dear home of our earlier days.'"

"My sweet Lucy!—my poor little Georgiana!"

"Not *little* now, love!—Both are taller than yourself; both handsome and distinguished-looking;—Lucy is the image of her mother."

"*Of her mother*, of the mother who disgraced her!" And the invalid sunk back upon her pillow, exhausted by emotion.

Lady Robert forbore to molest her by any interruption to the absorbing current of her reflections; but from time to time she silently wiped away the cold dew that gathered upon the deathlike forehead of her friend.

There was nothing bespeaking absolute poverty or privation in that little chamber; but its limits were indeed narrow, and its furniture mean and faded, compared with the former high condition of its unhappy tenant. One female servant seemed to be her universal attendant; and her own appearance, although scrupulously and delicately neat, owed no adornment to the white wrapper of humblest materials in which she was enveloped. There was a character of parsimonious lowliness in every thing by which poor Lucy was surrounded, more touching perhaps to the feelings of the spectator than any symptoms of absolute want. In such an extremity the impulse of seeking to afford relief is too strong to admit of the refinements of *mere* sympathy.

While poor Lucy lay thus absorbed in bitter rumination,

With hands upraised like one who prayed,

Lady Robert was startled by the sound of an equipage driven abruptly to the door, and announced by a fashionable knock of the loudest and most peremptory kind; and on removing the curtain she perceived the showy carriage of Lady Wroxton.

"Surely you are not well enough to see her?" she enquired of the invalid, who was trembling with nervous agitation.

"Indeed I am not! Yet I hardly dare refuse myself to her — for she knows I never leave the house. Besides, she must have seen your carriage, and will perplex and grieve me by angry notes of remonstrance after her return to town. Lady Wroxton *has* been kind to me, and I should be sorry to irritate her."

No further time was allowed for discussion; Lady Wroxton, with much audible panting and discomposure, was heard ascending the creaking staircase. In another moment the door was thrown open with an air of consternation by the maidservant, and her ladyship, arrayed in all the most gorgeous pomp of fashion, languished into the room.

"Well — my dear soul — how are you? — Lady Robert, how do you find her to-day?"

"Low and nervous, as you may perceive: but I trust that quiet will restore her," observed Lady Robert in significant reprehension of Lady Wroxton's elevated voice, and fussy *entrée*.

"You really *must* exert yourself, Lucy," said Lady W. in a still louder key, and throwing herself into a chair. "It is quite absurd to give way to all this hysteric nonsense. The weather is so fine, and the world so gay, that I consider it quite shocking — quite wicked to be out of spirits or discontented; — I do indeed, my dear."

"Happy those who have no greater sin to task their repentance," said Lucy, in a low faint voice.

Lady Wroxton now drew off her gloves, clasped and

unclasped her multitude of glittering bracelets, and betrayed, by a thousand unnatural manœuvres, the awkward consciousness of finding herself in the presence of one by whom she was despised, and had been slighted. She had too much experience of the world not to be fully aware that Lady Robert Lorton had determinately, although by moderate degrees, renounced her intimacy and dismissed her from all the familiarity of friendship; and feeling her own insufficiency of influence in society to meet these slights by open warfare, she contented herself, on any accidental meeting, by avenging her wrongs on the head of the helpless Lucy; or by the utterance of some flippant impertinence to Lady Robert, which generally recoiled on her own head, and gave pain to nobody but herself.

"What a little oven you have chosen for yourself here, Lucy; surely this close atmosphere cannot be good for an invalid!"

"Open the window for me," said Lucy mildly to her better friend, who rose and obeyed with forbearing silence.

"It required the experience of this room," continued Lady Wroxton not a whit abashed, "to persuade me that any place could be rendered hotter and more oppressive than the opera last night. To be sure Malibran was in charming voice, and afforded one some compensation; — I really prefer her to Pasta! — What do you say, Lady Robert?"

"Yes! — no! — any thing you please."

"And you, Lucy?"

"I have never heard her," replied the sufferer, not venturing to remonstrate with Lady Wroxton's levity.

"To be sure you have not! — I always forget that you lead the life of a recluse. But before the season is over, Lucy — when the town grows quite thin, you *must* come with me *incog.* and hear this new syren. You shall wear your bonnet, and sit at the back of the box, if you prefer it; — I am sure it will amuse you and do you good."

Lucy did not answer; but Lady Robert perceived that her breath grew short, and without observation placed her vinaigrette in her hands.

"By the way, my dear, your sweet girls were just

opposite to me last night, with the Duchess of Lisborough. They were surrounded with men; and unless I am very much mistaken, Lord Basingstoke was flirting desperately with the youngest."

"I think you *must* be very much mistaken," said Lady Robert, attempting to screen the emotion of her friend, "for Basingstoke was with me in Arlington Street the greater part of the evening."

"Well, well! I trust I am!—He is not a very safe person for a girl to flirt with; for he is a very general admirer—rides with Lady Clara Radbourne—practises the mazurka with Claudia Willingham;—so that a little *débutante*—a novice in the fashionable world like Miss Georgiana Barringhurst—would have very little probability of success, and a great chance of burning her fingers. Besides," continued Lady Wroxton, looking mysterious, "he is intimately linked with persons who do no credit to his taste; and who could not with propriety be tolerated by any friend or connection of our dear Lucy's."

The helpless object of this unfeeling innuendo turned a look of painful enquiry towards Lady Robert—but she dared not mention Mr. Tichborne's name; nor, in Lady Wroxton's scornful presence, would she even allude to that of her daughter.

"You have nothing to fear on such a point," replied Lady Robert Lorton, definitively. "I have every reason to believe that Lord Basingstoke has long devoted his serious attentions to Claudia Willingham."

"And have you really and truly credulity enough to suppose that even a young man so green and so silly as Lord Basingstoke—even the rawest boy from Eton or Harrow—could be taken in at this time of day by such a recognised establishment-hunter as one of the Willinghams?—Impossible! my dear Lady Robert!—even *your* good-natured partiality cannot blind you to the fact that those girls are the fable of the clubs—exposed to the sneers of all the boy-guardsmen, and college-tigers."

"Are they so much altered?—they were lovely girls but a very few years ago," observed Lucy, to deprecate the angry reply she saw gathering on the lips of her friend.

"Altered? — they have not so much as the shadow of good looks remaining. They have exactly the faded, withered appearance of plants which one sees returning from their London *abonnement* to some nursery-ground; all their bloom having been forced into premature existence for a temporary show, and blighted by the noisome atmosphere of habitual dissipation."

Lady Wroxton rose as she spoke; and going towards the paltry looking-glass over the mantel-piece, whose tawdry lodging-house frame formed a margin doubling its reflective extent, began to arrange her jetty curls — a splendid production of modern art — over the highly-rouged cheeks of her still handsome countenance. "*Serious* attentions to Claudia Willingham! — no, no, my dear Lady Robert! you cannot for a moment indulge in such an absurd supposition!"

"I find myself daily and hourly compelled to believe in such singular incredibilities," Lady Robert began; but she instantly checked herself. She had just sufficient self-command to repress the bitter rejoinder which was rising to her lips; for she felt that any altercation with Lady Wroxton in Lucy's presence would tend only to agitate and distress the invalid. Let those who know the verbal tendencies of feminine indignation appreciate and applaud her forbearance!

Lady Wroxton, however, was so little grateful for her moderation, that she scrupled not to provoke her disgust by an *insinuation* still more insolent — far — *far* more cruel; that Lord Basingstoke might possibly be induced to direct his attentions to Miss Willingham, from a secret hesitation to enter on a matrimonial engagement with a girl under Georgiana Barringhurst's peculiar circumstances.

Lady Robert was horror-struck by this act of barbarity; — she could not pronounce a single word in refutation of an opinion which she was satisfied would convey a finishing wound to the anguish of the repentant mother; but she turned towards Lucy with still tenderer endearments, as if to pacify a sorrow she was incapable of removing.

"The last bitter drop of torment in an overbrimming cup!" faltered Lucy, as she hung over her. "Yet surely

it will something avail me in the sight of Heaven, if I lift it patiently to my lips! — And dream not, my dear friend, that this miserable idea suggests itself *now* for the first time to my mind; ever since their introduction into society, my persuasion of the evil influence their mother's reputation might shed over their destinies has been my besetting misery."

"Oh! you see things far too much *en noir!*" exclaimed Lady Wroxton, somewhat ashamed, and preparing for her departure. "All that sort of thing is so soon forgotten in the hubbub of London! One scandal of the day defeats and obliterates its predecessor! and most people, in observing the strong affection that subsists between your girls and Lady Barringhurst imagine them to be her own daughters. She is really more than a mother to them."

The sufferer replied by a hollow and half-subdued moan of agony.

"Good-by, dear Lucy. Now pray do not mope and fret yourself to death over those nasty methodistical books which I always find stuffed under your pillow."

"Good-by!" replied Lucy Tichborne, extending her hand as if in an expiatory act of Christian forgiveness.

"Can I do any thing for you in London — any commissions? — Really the town is so intemperately and bewilderingly thronged and cheerful this morning, that before I came here I tried the doors of two or three vanity-marts without being able to get the carriage up; and now I am hurrying back to Howell and James's to secure a love of a lama dress, which I am sadly afraid will be gone before my arrival. But as I had promised to look in upon you one day this week, I would not disappoint you."

"Thank you for your intended kindness; but do not let me detain you from your business; you see I shall not be left alone."

As she left the room, Lady Wroxton darted a glance of detestation towards Lady Robert Lorton; whose gestures were involuntarily expressive of an equal disgust as the carriage ostentatiously rolled from the humble gate.

"I congratulate you!" said she to her friend, with an appearance of being herself relieved from persecution.

"Not on her departure — do not congratulate me on her departure — but rather upon my power of submission to her visits! I look upon them as one of my most salutary modes of trial, as one of my most valuable means of self-mortification."

"The methodistical books Lady Wroxton presumes to reprobate seem to have taught you many an important lesson, and to afford you an anchor of sustainment which I cannot but envy. Lucy, Lucy! in your present humiliated frame of mind you can have little to dread: — the only tribunal you are now destined to encounter is one of more merciful construction than the courts of human judgment; you have plucked every evil thought from your bosom — you have covered your head with the bitter ashes of penitence — and verily you will have your reward!"

"You regard me with a partial eye, my dear, kind friend; but I must not allow the soothing of your gentleness, any more than that of my own vain heart, to deceive me at this solemn period. You scarcely imagine it; yet at this moment I am wrestling with one of the fond, frail suggestions of a sinful human nature."

"I cannot believe it to be one of *very* evil prompting," said Lady Robert with a compassionate smile.

"You heard what Lady Wroxton asserted respecting my poor girls?"

"I did, indeed! and shuddered at her unwomanly cruelty."

"Nay, I meant not that; — I allude not to Bessy's cutting taunt; but to her suggestion touching the affection subsisting between them and — and Lady Barringhurst."

"And which, alas! from ocular demonstration, I have every reason to think imaginary on the part of Lady Wroxton. I never saw a more decided absence of tenderness than on both sides."

Lucy started from her pillow, and gratefully seized the hand of her friend. "God forgive me! God forgive me! that I should triumph in such a thought! But — would

you believe it ? — I have the weakness to be cruelly jealous of the character of their feelings towards that woman ! Above all other earthly punishment would be the certainty that she had superseded me in their love."

" I am convinced that on such a point you have nothing to apprehend."

" Blessed consolation ! — Did you but know how much that woman — that Milicent Darnham — proved herself my enemy ; — by what cunning arts she wormed herself first into my confidence, and then into that of poor Barringhurst ! — irritating him, by false suggestions, into a degree of cruelty and injustice which drove me first into the commission of perilous follies — and finally into the entanglements of crime."

" Doubtless she had her own views in ensuring your flight."

" Unfortunately they have proved triumphant. But I could not — no ! with all the aids of religion to soften my heart — I fear I could never teach myself to rejoice that my children had learned to regard her as a mother."

Lucy's medical attendant was now announced, and readily perceived that some unusual excitement had agitated the feelings of the invalid. " I fancy it is *you* whom I must scold," said he, turning to Lady Robert. " I cannot believe you to be an unwelcome visiter ; but unless this accelerated pulse deceives me, you are a very unsafe one."

" Instead of defending myself," she replied, " I will leave you with your patient, that you may at least attempt to amend my indiscretions."

" But you will come again soon," murmured Lucy, as Lady Robert bent over her parched lips for a parting kiss.

" I will ; and should any thing transpire — should I find a single word of happy promise to communicate — I will write to you instantly, perhaps to-night."

" Do not forget that my time is short ! — that the eyes which languish for their last earthly pleasure will soon be closed in the darkness of the grave."

" My dear, good ladies !" interrupted the benevolent physician, " remember I cannot admit of these agitating interviews. Unless Lady Robert Lorton will promise to

assist me in supporting my patient's spirits with cheerful conversation and a happier countenance, I must positively prohibit her return."

"Forgive me for this one time," said she, attempting to smile; "and when I come again, will bring such excellent tidings as to supersede the necessity of all your future exertions."

In a moment her gentle footsteps glided from the chamber of sickness;—a chamber which she had not visited in vain, either for her own sake, or for that of its fast-declining inmate. Her inward heart was chastened by the spectacle of such profound affliction; and as Lady Robert drove along the by-way of Park Lane, in order to avoid the splendid mob swarming in the drive of Hyde Park—as she noted the various equipages—that of Lady Wroxton among the rest—of Lucy's former friends, many of whom had rivalled her indiscretion without sharing in her condemnation—she could not but shrink from the remembrance of her own course of worldly vanity!

She saw the same coronets, the same liveries glaring in the sunshine;—equestrians pairing off in many a couple—flirtations proceeding through the windows of many a flaunting equipage, which had haunted the same spot during the married days of Lady Barringhurst. The young, and the gay, and the thoughtless, were before her in all the giddy indulgence of their dangerous pleasures; and as she reverted from all she saw to all she had recently witnessed in the chamber of the miserable Lucy, she shuddered to think of the heavy retributions falling upon a life of levity!

CHAPTER X.

And thronging thoughts—remembrances of youth—
And early love—and home—and all the spells
Which stir the spirit from its lassitude
Came back upon his soul with that one word
Of obsolete endearment. SOUTHEY.

"WHO dines with us to-day, my dear Anastasia?" enquired the Duke of Lisborough, entering a boudoir such

as a peri might have sighed to inhabit;—a boudoir hung with the softest silken draperies—twined with arabesques of the palest gold—carpeted with embossed velvet, and decorated with vases of Sèvres, containing flowers of such rare and choice selection as had yet shed their perfumes in no other mansion of the kingdom.

"Indeed I do not know," replied the gentle duchess, giving an eager jerk to the golden vice on which her netting was fastened. "I have very little memory for a catalogue of indifferent names;—you had better ask Fonbelles, or the groom of the chambers."

"Oh, I am not anxious to perplex your recollections to the full amount of the dinner-table," replied his grace, good-naturedly. "But perceiving preparations in the dining-room for a large party, I wished to know whether it comprised merely our family, or intimate friends, or whether it is to be a formal affair."

"In order that you may make your own arrangements for getting away early to Lady Rachel Verney's?"

"My dear Anastasia!" said the duke, looking significantly towards Lady Clara Radbourne, whom he had found sitting with his wife, and who was now busily employed in pulling a pink magnolia to pieces, and scattering the leaves on the floor, "you know that I have not been in Lady Rachel's house six times during the last six years."

"With more consideration for my feelings and your own respectability, you would not have been there *once;* as you are well aware that neither Charlotte nor myself think proper to visit Lord Grandville's mistress."

"Anastasia, Anastasia," interrupted the duke, "how much is it beneath you to repeat such idle scandals!—As to Lady Grayfield, I hold *her* to be still more inexcusable; for she knows full well that Lady Rachel Verney was the chosen associate and friend of her own beloved mother."

"Possibly! but since the days of that auspicious friendship, people have learned to see things with their own eyes, and call things by their right names. I fancy there are many of the late Duchess of Lisborough's intimate associates with whom *I* should be very sorry to find myself connected."

The duke's colour rose to his temples, for he had dearly loved his mother; and his filial affection gave greater energy to his reply than was wont to animate his words. "Either Charlotte Grayfield or yourself might do well to emulate so amiable, so pleasing, so feminine a being! — Few, indeed, are those among our modern women of fashion, who can pretend to her attractions or ——"

"Her domestic virtues!" retorted the duchess with a sneer, and a glance of triumph towards her friend Lady Clara. "However, I need not have taxed you with an intended visit to this Verney woman; — for I now remember that this is one of Lady Cosmo Somerset's nights, which I know you would not miss for the world; you are there, at least, secure of meeting all Lady Robert Lorton's Willingham-tribe of adventurers."

"For your own sake and mine, I trust you apply that word inadvertently; Lady Clara is probably aware that Lady Maria Willingham — by birth a De Vesci — is a near relative of our own."

"By the way, duchess," observed Lady Clara, tossing away the stalk of the hapless flower she had been leisurely demolishing, "surely you were telling me, when the Duke of Lisborough came in, that those very Willinghams dine with you to-day?"

"Did I?" said Anastasia, blushing for the meanness of her detected falsehood. "Unimportant facts and unimportant people are apt to slip through ones's memory. But here is Fonbelle's list; — yes! the three Willinghams and their little self-sufficient heiress; Lord and Lady Robert, and Charlotte Grayfield; Béthizy — Russell — that singing Mr. Mulgrave, and Mr. Charles Willingham. Yes! I remember now! It is your own especial party; — the ancient Calmersfield tribe of loves and graces; with the valuable addition of that coxcomb, Monsieur de Béthizy, whom Lady Grayfield begged me to invite, that she might amuse herself with Miss de Vesci's prudish airs on his behalf; and the Barringhursts — whom I took the liberty of asking to please myself — inasmuch as I think Mr. Willingham is inclined to admire Georgiana."

Again did the duchess glance significantly towards Lady

Clara Radbourne; while the duke, who judged it better to leave the two mysterious ladies to themselves, observed as he left the boudoir, "If I meet Basingstoke, I will ask him to join the party, for a reason of a similar kind. And by the way, Anastasia, I am beginning to have hopes of you, since you turn even *your* demure thoughts towards the indiscretions of match-making; I shall find you giving waltzing-parties, and visiting poor Lady Rachel Verney after all."

"Do you allow of that sort of impertinence?" enquired Lady Clara Radbourne, after he had fairly left the room.

"Indeed I do not! In the course of the evening I will take care to make Lisborough pay the penalty of the offence. And since he intends to ask Basingstoke, Clara, you must positively send home for your dress and dine here yourself. The duke only proposes the measure by way of conciliating that odious Claudia Willingham, and tormenting me; and I shall therefore meet him on his own ground. Mélanide shall dress your hair—you must look your best—and then, Miss Claudia, take heed of your conquest."

"I am not much afraid to enter the lists with *her*;—eighteen against eight-and-twenty are fearful odds in my favour! I am much more afraid of that dove-eyed Georgiana Barringhurst;—she looks so uncommonly sly, and so ostentatiously humble."

"Oh, that matter you must leave to my arrangement. I flatter myself that, thanks to my ample experience with Lisborough's obstinate temper, I am far from a bad manager. I have quite made up my mind—both for poor dear Lady Barringhurst's interests and your own, that Georgiana shall marry that prosy Mr. Willingham."

"That sandy-haired piece of solemnity!"

"Oh, he can be delightfully agreeable when he chooses: one day, at dinner, at the Cosmo Somersets, he entertained a whole party of bores, and without the slightest effort. Besides, he is an only son, with immense expectations; and every one prophecies that he will live to be premier!"

"Then I think you had better get him for *me*, instead of Lord Basingstoke. I verily believe the only reason mamma has set her heart upon that match is to vex Lady

Robert and her *protégée*, Miss Claudia; who, you know, were formerly in combination to keep our lady-mother at Coventry. As to me, I have no particular fancy for Bazy; and I think the chances of being wife to the prime minister are well worth the exchange."

"Unluckily Charles Willingham appears to have taken a fancy to this little Barringhurst girl: he is intimate, on political grounds, with her father; and he has a stiff old maid of a sister who was formerly a great friend to Millicent. I think they will manufacture a match out of all these materials."

"Well! I shall despatch a note to mamma, apprising her that I dine here — and *why;* and Mélanide shall bring me my pink dress of *velours d'Ispahan* — which is my robe of triumph. And then for the tug of war with Claudia and Georgiana."

At the banquets of the great, there is generally very little opportunity for the exertion of finesse in seeking and retaining places in an eligible neighbourhood; the definite rank of the guests is too peremptory a claim to be waved, even at the suggestion of youth and beauty and personal predilection. The poor Duke of Lisborough found himself inevitably supported by the fiery Lady Radbourne and the frigid Lady Barringhurst; and it was only by dint of much obstinate manœuvring, and defiance of the suggestion of the groom of the chambers, that Charles Willingham contrived to station himself by the side of Miss de Vesci. His exultation was somewhat damped, indeed, when he perceived the radiant countenance of Monsieur de Béthizy unfolding his supercilious smiles on her left hand. And two other personages were almost equally discomposed by the arrangement; the duchess — who had intended the future premier to bestow the charms of his conversation on Georgiana Barringhurst; and Lady Grayfield, who felt a singular curiosity to discover whether those of the young Parisian possessed the miraculous gift of witty animation which the judgment of universal London had assigned to the colloquial flippancy of Monsieur de Béthizy.

"I have some intelligence for you, my dear Minnie,' said Mr. Willingham, lowering his voice under cover of

the maître d'hôtel's officious distribution of the several varieties of *potage*, so as to be secure from Lady Maria Willingham's attentive ears.

"Let it be agreeable! — or this *Julienne* will breathe its tarragonic vapours in vain. If you have any thing ill-natured or ill-omened to relate ——"

"Nay ——"

"You know, and *I* know, that you excel in both particulars: so if you have any disagreeable intelligence, let us reserve it for the dessert. I neither eat ice, nor drink claret."

"I have no reasons to think that my news will diminish your appetite by the wing of an ortolan, or the claw of a shrimp. Our friend Lorimer will be at Calais to-morrow, and on Thursday in London!"

"Is that all? I have known it these five days; and having been admitted for the first time to poor dear Lady Lorimer this morning, we have been talking of nothing else but Frederick's arrival. I was in hopes you had some agreeable variety to offer me."

"I am aware," said Mr. Willingham, somewhat vexed by what he regarded as levity on the part of Miss de Vesci, "that the caprices of woman's nature require the constant excitement of novelty; but still I should have imagined that an event of so much moment to yourself might have preserved its interest somewhat longer than the report of a fashionable marriage, or the scandal of a fashionable elopement."

"Thank you for your rebuke; I told you just now that you had a happy talent for the utterance of ill-natured opinions. Nevertheless I *shall* feel most truly gratified by Frederick's arrival; and one of my first anxieties will be to assure him of the friendly zeal with which you have executed his commission; of the affectionate care with which you have watched over my happiness, counselled my inexperience, and rewarded my efforts to obtain your good opinion."

"Your *efforts!* Minnie, Minnie! I am perfectly acquainted with your contempt of all my antiquated prejudices, and unfashionable principles! —*My* good opinion!

— what an affectation of humility on the part of Miss de Vesci of Bensleigh Park!"

"You have always laid so much stress on my accession of importance since my uncle's death that I am beginning to believe you, Charles, a very worldly-minded person. You have never treated me with the simple honesty of friendly affection since I became what is called an heiress."

"You have mistaken your date; think again."

"From what other event can I date the alteration of your demeanour towards me?"

"From your engagement with Lord Stapylford."

Minnie was silenced in a moment. Her own reminiscences afforded ample confirmation of the truth of Mr. Willingham's assertion. Grieved and confused by the accusation she had thus wantonly brought upon herself, she turned towards Monsieur de Béthizy in the hope of finding relief from her embarrassment in his lively *badinage;* but having perceived the young heiress to be engaged in something resembling a serious altercation with her cousin and neighbour, Béthizy was now directing his irrepressible vivacity towards the entertainment of Lady Clara Radbourne, who hoped to attract the jealous notice of Lord Basingstoke by the affectation of immoderate delight with which she listened to the amphibious, half-French, half-English witticisms of the bear-leader of the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg.

Nor were men and things better distributed among the residue of the guests! Lady Grayfield, instead of the ranting Frenchman who had so much excited her curiosity, and whom she was rather intent upon reforming from the evil of his ways (and means), was seated next to Conversation-Russell; who was favouring her with an account of some of Champollion's latest discoveries, and with his own private theory of mummyology. He had many learned wonders to tell of Egypt, culled from Denon and Dr. Young, the *Zauberflöte*, Mrs. Charles Lushington, Bankes, Legh, Belzoni — and the inedited memoirs of Ben D'Lhi Badalli Hazarrah, the Morocco envoy to the court of Spain! He had a brother who had served with Abercrombie — a cousin who had been consul at Alexandria; he criticised Anasta-

sius, and sneered at the Epicurean; and, until his mouth was stopped with some excellent *filets de levereau au jus d'orange amer*, Lady Grayfield fairly wished him under the base of the great pyramid, or following the descending current of the Nile towards the great cataract!

Nor were the Willingham girls more fortunate in their destination. Having been made aware by Lady Robert Lorton that they were to encounter the trying rivalship of the young and lovely Barringhursts, they had called in every art of the toilet to their own aid. The slight tinge of *rouge végétal superfin*, which was to simulate the blush of maiden modesty — the profuse ringlets of jetty hue and silken softness, which were to flow in dishevelled grace around their brows — the shoulders bared to the extreme verge of decent endurance — the laboured smile — the elaborate plaitings and gatherings and puffings which purported to disguise the absence of many a youthful charm and girlish grace — such were the superfluous beauties in which they had arrayed themselves to compete with the inimitable captivations of a perfectly artless demeanour, and a perfectly simple costume. Claudia and Eleanor might have been worshipped as the very queens of fashion; but Lucy and Georgiana, as the humblest and loveliest of their handmaidens, would have won every idolater from the shrine!

Had the Willinghams, however, boasted their brightest attractions of *auld lang syne* — the smiles of their very earliest days of establishment-hunting — all, on the present occasion, would have proved in vain. Claudia was seated beside Henry Mulgrave, whom she detested as a younger brother, unless when he was useful in exhibiting her voice to advantage by the relief of his own beautiful tenor; and poor Eleanor was utterly extinguished between Lord Barringhurst and Lord Robert Lorton, who, with the exquisite politeness of married Englishmen, discussed the emigration question by a cross-fire over her plate, during three courses and the dessert! — Such are the *contre-temps* of a dinner-party composed of ill-assorted persons!

Among the numerous Anglicisms which the prejudiced duchess had been the means of introducing into Lisborough House, that of a prolonged separation of the male and female

guests had never been effected. The duke, like most other men who have resided much upon the Continent, was in the habit of drinking wine as an accompaniment to dinner, instead of swallowing it as a solitary dose: he was always one of the first to walk into the drawing-room; and his secret persuasion that Anastasia would take very little pains, on the present occasion, to entertain her female associates, rather accelerated his movements. Mr. Willingham immediately followed him; and observing that Lady Robert Lorton and Miss de Vesci were alone absent from the little group surrounding a circular table covered with all the new publications of the day, and every engraving of distinguished merit, he pursued his search through one or two adjacent chambers which seemed to be lighted up for reception.

As he approached the most remote of these, the beautiful boudoir which had been the scene of her grace's morning *démêlé* with the duke—a sound of distress forewarned him that it was already occupied; and as the plaintive voice which reached his ear was of female intonation, delicacy whispered that he must not presume to intrude. It occurred to him, however, that it might be that of Miss de Vesci —of his own Minnie!—and apprehensive that some painful occurrence might have agitated her feelings, or that perhaps his own comments during dinner might have tended to grieve and vex her, he could not refrain from overstepping the prohibited threshold.

In a moment he was convinced and satisfied; but he was satisfied also of his own indiscretion. Minnie was kneeling on an ottoman before Lady Robert Lorton, and assisting her to comfort and support Miss Barringhurst, who was seated by her side on the divan encircling the boudoir, and weeping bitterly. Mr. Willingham made a precipitate retreat, but not before Miss de Vesci's rapid eyes had detected his entrance. Instantly rising from her knees, she followed him into the anteroom, and whispered, with much trepidation of manner, "Dearest Charles! pray linger near the door; and if the Barringhursts or the duchess attempt to enter, pray do your best to detain them from us by conversation."

She flew back again before he had time to seek even a

moment's explanation—he was completely mystified! One thing, however, he had heard—and heard distinctly; Minnie had called him "dearest Charles!" and for the first time, alas! during very many years. The emotion which this reminiscent sound had sufficed to stir within his heart for some time occupied his whole attention; nor was he roused from his reverie till Miss Barringhurst, leaning on Minnie de Vesci's arm, and followed by Lady Robert Lorton, passed him with a tolerably tranquil demeanour on her return from the boudoir to the drawing-room.

Mr. Willingham felt that he would have given worlds for a few minutes' conversation with his cousin; but this was impossible. On entering the saloon, he found her surrounded by Monsieur de Béthizy, Lord Basingstoke, Beau Russell, and several others of the party; so that any communication of a confidential nature was out of the question. In spite of the lively animation with which she entered into the playful trifling of her sisters and their friends, he fancied that her eyes bore the trace of recent tears, and again he became painfully anxious to ascertain their origin. While Claudia and Eleanor therefore were preparing to comply with the duchess's request for music, and to join with Mr. Mulgrave in a trio—a former favourite of the Duke of Lisborough's—he contrived to address her unobserved.

"The kind manner in which you deigned just now——" he began—but Miss Willingham hastily interrupted him.

"Oh, do not recur to *that;*—in the agitation of addressing you I know not what I said."

"And thanks to that very agitation, you spoke to me in the tone and terms you *once* employed at all seasons and in every mood. The change has perhaps made me too bold—too sanguine—too happy!—for it has given me courage to ask for an explanation of the scene I witnessed just now. Can you forgive my indiscretion?"

"I can, indeed—and the more willingly because I hope you may be able to tell me in return how Mary has prospered in our cause."

"In what cause?"

Miss de Vesci, with great delicacy, and with as much brevity as the circumstances would admit, now explained

to Mr. Willingham the unhappy position of the Miss Barringhursts and their mother; and of Lady Robert Lorton's sanguine trust in his sister's interposition with her friend Milicent.

"This is indeed a very serious attempt, and one that should not be lightly undertaken. To interfere in a dilemma of so much delicacy is to intrude with unjustifiable boldness into the domestic privacies of another," observed Charles Willingham with stern gravity.

"But think of this unhappy woman — of this dying mother."

"She has but encountered the doom originally braved by her wilful profligacy."

"Do not judge her too severely! — I can forgive your harsh comments on my own conduct, my dearest cousin — for I am prosperous, and young, and happy. But this unhappy being is poor, and wretched, and expiring; do not — do not — judge her so severely!"

While Minnie continued to address him in this strain, Mr. Willingham could have listened for ever; nay, he was even inclined to sacrifice his own opinion on the subject to his cousin's gentle pleading.

"I know not how Mary may have succeeded," said he at length; "I fear but ill; or she would have hastened to communicate her tidings. But as you have trusted the sister, you may perhaps condescend to employ the brother in the same cause; — I have myself some interest with Lord Barringhurst — suffer me to employ it in attempting to achieve your object."

"This is kind beyond my utmost expectations!"

"Minnie! — what kindness — what exertion have you not a right to command at my hands?"

"My conscience reminds me that I have already too often abused my claims on your forbearance."

"And at what hour to-morrow may I call to acquaint you with my success or failure?"

"At any! — at all hours you are sure of admittance."

"At two then?"

"At two! — and may every good angel speed you on your errand of mercy!"

CHAPTER XI.

The love of higher things and better days,
The unbounded hope and heavenly ignorance
Of what is called the world, and the world's ways;
The moments when we gather from a glance
More joy than from all future pride or praise,
Which kindle manhood—but can ne'er entrance
The heart in an existence of its own,
Of which another's bosom is his zone. BYRON.

IT was not often that Mr. Willingham's heart had been agitated by such a variety of pleasing emotions, as conspired to bewilder his feelings when he approached the dwelling of Lady Maria and her daughters on the following day. Endowed—or rather afflicted—in a supreme degree with that reserve of character which forms a species of moral epidemic in England, Charles Willingham was habitually intent on disavowing and disguising every impulse of his nature that could be supposed to verge on tenderness or enthusiasm. Believing such demonstrations to be derogatory to the dignity of masculine firmness, and dreading that his own irrepressible sensibility should be confounded with the affectations of the feeble and the foolish, he had laboured to assume an iron vizor, in concealment of the mutable expression of his countenance. And thus he had acquired a tone of seriousness more consonant with his political vocation than with his years; and a general reputation of coldness and impracticability of disposition, wholly unaccordant with his real nature.

But there existed another latent cause for the gravity of Mr. Willingham's address, and for his air of recklessness and unsociability. Although quoted upon all occasions among his youthful contemporaries, as a man who might have been worn within the heart of hearts of the Prince of Denmark—as a man who "was not passion's slave,"—the young heir of Heddeston Court was in truth the most devoted, as well as the most hopeless, of all the multitudinous lovers of modern Europe! He could scarcely remember how long it was since he had first adored his cousin Minnie; and although he could have accurately defined both the day, and the hour, and the spot, in which

he had become aware of her own engrossing attachment for her playfellow, Montague Stapylford, he would have found it a very difficult task to conjecture when, where, and how his bootless affection for Miss de Vesci might become subdued into a becoming moderation of cousinly regard.

For many years past—for long, wearisome, vexatious years—he had been sensible indeed of the hopelessness of his attachment, and had constantly revolved within the secrecy of his mind those thousand and one plausible axioms of philosophy which are supposed to be efficacious in regulating all superfluous action of the heart. He had told himself that he was a fool and a madman — till he was tired of the monotony of that uncontradicted assertion; he had promised himself to overcome his idle attachment —until he was ashamed of renewing the broken covenant; and still, alas! — unmoved by parliamentary pursuits, or agricultural experiments — by enclosure-bills or railways — by sedentary winters at Heddeston Court, or rambling summers among the Pyrenees — still he found himself as passionately in love as ever!

From the moment when he had first beheld his cousin Minnie with a lapful of roses, sitting beside her father's couch of sickness, to that in which he found the lovely heiress, Miss de Vesci, presiding in her splendid mansion in Portman Square, no human creature had ever rivalled her in the partial tenderness of his heart. He had marked her growing attachment for Lord Stapylford — he believed in her actual engagement to Lord Lorimer — yet still he loved her; he felt that he might as well cease to exist as tear this cherished passion from his heart!

With this strong impulse to actuate his feelings, it is not wonderful that the change of manner evinced towards him at Lisborough House by the object of his idolatry should have excited the most agitating tumult in his mind. He forbore, like many another lover, to consult his reason on such a perplexing point; he was satisfied to enjoy the affectionate friendship of his cousin, without further self-interrogation; and when, according to his appointment, he visited her on the morrow, the pleasing tidings he had to

communicate touching his own successful exertions with Lord Barringhurst, in pursuance of her wishes, had filled his heart with delightful anticipations of his cousin's overflowing gratitude, and of his own "measureless content." He found himself approaching the presence of his beloved, in a rapture of emotion such as he had rarely felt, and would have blushed to acknowledge — even to himself.

What, then, was the transition of feeling — what the overpowering vexation — with which, on entering the drawing-room in Portman Square, he perceived the object of all these sensitive promptings seated upon a sofa, with visible traces of tears upon her cheeks, and with Lord Lorimer by her side! The warm greeting with which he was instantly welcomed by his friend sufficed, for a moment, to conceal the suspension of his own utterance; and Frederick was so warm and so fluent in his thanks for the kindness with which Mr. Willingham had exerted himself in Lady Lorimer's behalf, upon occasion of the recent death of his father, that the visiter found time to recover his self-possession, ere he ventured upon a reply. Still he found, or fancied it impossible, to conceal his own surprise and embarrassment; and more particularly when, after sundry incoherent attempts to express the gratification he felt upon his friend's unexpected arrival, he fancied he could discern a glance of good intelligence pass between Lord Lorimer and Miss de Vesci; followed by a smile on his part, and a deep blush on that of the lady: — Mr. Willingham grew angry! — and his indignation scarcely served to amend his eloquence.

"It may, perhaps, interest you very little — *this morning* — to learn that I have been successful in my embassy to Lord Barringhurst," said he gravely, to Miss de Vesci. "I have obeyed your commands; and having now acquainted you with the result, I will no longer intrude upon your time. Lord Lorimer has, probably, business of more importance to communicate."

"*Lord* Lorimer!" reiterated Frederick, equally astonished and diverted by his solemnity of manner.

"*Business!*" repeated Minnie, in the same tone.

"Why, my dear Willingham, do you really suppose that

I cannot entertain your cousin for an hour, without assuming the airs of my vocation, and talking to her about India Bonds, and the 3 per cents.? Do you set me down for such a Jack-in-office, as to intrude my 'guardianship' upon a morning visit?"

Mr. Willingham, thus rallied, resumed his seat; but he could not so easily resume the composure of his demeanour.

"Nevertheless," continued Lord Lorimer with the most malicious significance, "I will not compel you to remain here against your will. Miss de Vesci and I have reached the conclusion of our gossipry; we have been talking an infinite deal of nothing for three hours past, by the Shrewsbury clock; and as I shall return here to dinner, I will spare poor Minnie the remainder of my discourse until this evening."

Mr. Willingham looked as if he would have gladly seen this familiar friend of his own and of his cousin torn to pieces by wild horses; but he compelled himself to smile a ghastly smile, as Lord Lorimer proceeded to ring, and enquire for his horses. He immediately determined to outstay him, and ensure a few minutes of uninterrupted conversation with Minnie.

"If you have no engagement, my dear Willingham," said Lord Lorimer, wholly unsuspicious of his intentions, "pray come and chaperon me in a visit to your sister. Miss de Vesci assures me that I shall not obtain admittance in Grosvenor Square unless sanctioned by your august presence, or by *her* intercession."

Mr. Willingham, unprepared with an excuse, was forced to comply; and in a few minutes he found himself riding in friendly familiarity, side by side, with his earliest friend and latest enemy. By degrees, the embarrassment of his feelings wore away; and, in conversing with Lord Lorimer upon subjects of public interest, he gradually resumed his former tone of intimate regard. When they were admitted to Mary's presence, however, her brother's consciousness of vague dissatisfaction was renewed. It appeared to his jaundiced eyes that Frederick's mode of addressing Miss Willingham was far too ardent to become the affianced lover

of Miss de Vesci; that there was far more of the tender trepidation of the lover in his demeanour towards his youthful playmate than towards his ward. Could Lord Lorimer be playing them false? Was he, in fact, the admirer of Mary, and the interested suitor of the heiress of Bensleigh? But no! Minnie's extreme loveliness and mighty powers of attraction forbade the jealous thought! Who — *who* could help loving Minnie?

Of the feelings entertained by Mary in return, he found himself, meanwhile, a very insufficient judge. In former times, particularly during the period of Frederick's boyish devotion to Eleanor Willingham, and the earlier portion of his absence from England, Charles had occasionally been led to suspect the existence of a partiality on his sister's part towards his gifted friend. But Mary had so little indulged in the regrets and fractiousness of an unhappy passion — her demeanour had been so uniformly forbearing, gentle, and cheerful — she had addressed herself so earnestly to the task of consoling others, rather than to the indulgence of her own feelings — that he had gradually relinquished all idea of her attachment for the absent Frederick. Even on the present occasion, her self-command was only for a moment suspended by the abrupt announcement of Lord Lorimer: she had so long taught herself to consider him as the affianced lover of her more fortunate cousin, that she had also learned to suspend the vehemence of her own predilections; and although she had recently acquired suspicions leading to a very different conclusion, she had not forfeited her own self-resignation to his indifference towards herself. A hectic blush suffused her cheeks for full ten minutes after his entrance; but it faded only to leave her some degrees paler than usual. Strange as it may appear, it was a relief to all parties when the visit was at an end; and although Mr. Willingham readily consented to accompany Lord Lorimer on his way to Downing Street, where he had business to transact at the Foreign Office, it was more from a hope of penetrating the mystery of his engagements with Miss de Vesci, than from any pleasure in his friend's society.

As they were lounging leisurely towards the official

quarter of the town, Monsieur de Béthizy, who was refreshing himself at Grange's with iced sherbet and wafers, caught a glimpse of Lord Lorimer, and hastened to join them. During his lordship's diplomatic apprenticeship at Paris, Béthizy had been one of his closest allies, and most constant companions; the shrewdness and lively humour of the Parisian *évaporé* compensated in Lord Lorimer's estimation for innumerable foibles.

"Ah! my dear Lorimer — a thousand welcomes; — your presence alone was required to render London charming! — And what brought you to England — and when did you come — and where are you going? — How did you ever make up your mind to desert St. Carlo for yonder old barrack in the Haymarket; and to quit the laughing shores of Calabria for the murky skies of the banks of the Thames?"

"Believe me, I am very well satisfied to set my foot again upon this '*dolce ad ingrata patria*' of mine."

"Ah, you are a fortunate fellow! They tell me you have just lost your father, and have succeeded to the possession of his estates. *Vivent les droits d'aînesse!* although, in my own case, they embrace nothing worthy inheritance but a few thousand acres of pine-trees in the Landes; — a sandy desert, whose vintage produces no juice more generous than turpentine! Still, for your sake, my dear Lorimer, — *Vivent les droits d'aînesse.*"

"As I have only one younger brother to gainsay my claims ——" Lord Lorimer began, in order to divert Mr. Willingham's indignant attention from Béthizy's flippancy. But his Parisian friend had no scruple in interrupting him; for this allusion to the position of his family and possessions had touched upon a chord peculiarly interesting to the feelings of Monsieur de Béthizy.

"Yes! you are indeed a fortunate fellow, my dear Lorimer; young, handsome, talented, noble, rich; — your father obliges you by dying before you are too old to enjoy his heritage."

Mr. Willingham could scarcely repress his disgust at the levity of this allusion. — "And you have, besides, the happiness and distinction of being guardian to the prettiest little creature to be seen out of Paris!"

Poor Charles! — to hear his cousin thus familiarly named by a man whom he detested — and to a man whom he believed that cousin to regard with a most unwarrantable degree of affection — was almost more than he could endure! But Monsieur de Béthizy, who looked upon him simply as a worthy young Englishman, of the Utilitarian school — as a country-cousin of Miss de Vesci's, addicted to an obscure and unprincipled tailor, and wholly unworthy of being admitted to any participation in her affairs — proceeded to inflict a still severer martyrdom upon his feelings.

"*Ah! ça, mon cher — dis donc!*" said he, again addressing Lord Lorimer in the most careless manner, on the subject nearest and dearest to Mr. Willingham's heart. "This little heiress of yours — is it true that you intend to marry her?"

"Indeed, I hardly know; *do you?*" exclaimed Lord Lorimer, laughing heartily at the unceremonious abruptness of the enquiry.

"*Sous votre bon plaisir!*" replied Monsieur de Béthizy, taking off his hat, with a solemn air of mock respect.

"My pleasure is very little to the purpose on this occasion," observed Lord Lorimer; "for that of the lady will incline, I fear, but little in your favour."

"My dear friend, let us understand each other," resumed Béthizy, with the greatest *sang froid;* "I have too sincere a regard for you to have interfered with your ward during your absence: — knowing that your arrival was shortly expected, I have deferred my formal proposals till I should have obtained your sanction to my views. And now, tell me *sans façon,* and in all friendly frankness — have you any personal designs on Miss Vesci; and if not, have I your permission to prosecute my own?"

Charles Willingham could scarcely repress the indignant remonstrance that rose to his lips, or his strong desire to inflict a castigation upon the impertinent querist. But he felt that the information he would himself have given worlds to obtain was on the point of being most unexpectedly and gratuitously vouchsafed to Monsieur de Béthizy's daring

effrontery; and he actually trembled with emotion as he awaited the reply of Lord Lorimer.

"My dear Béthizy," answered the young diplomatist, with most deliberate calmness, "you have acted according to your usual discretion, in consulting me thus freely and explicitly on the subject; and I have sincere pleasure in satisfying your scruples by an explanation equally frank. I have *no* engagements with Miss de Vesci, nor the smallest intention of seeking any. You must therefore be assured of the gratification I should feel in bestowing her hand and fortune on yourself ——"

Charles Willingham started with surprise and vexation, while Lord Lorimer continued, —

"Were it not that her affections are irrevocably fixed upon another person, to whom I trust to see her eventually united. Thus far, Béthizy, my friendship for you induces me to betray the secret of my ward; and I am satisfied that you are too much of a *preux chevalier* to urge me to any further explanation."

"Nay, I shall neither form a conjecture, nor indulge myself with a single regret! Your candour and my own have spared me a world of trouble and vexation; for I have a little speculation in view in Portland Place, which will serve my turn fully as well as Bensleigh Park. In the mean time, my dear fellow, pray for my better luck with the fair Arabella Westland. — *Monseuir Veelengarm, j'ai l'honneur de vous saluer! Lorimare — au revoir!*"

Mr. Willingham flattered himself that the ice being thus broken by Monsieur de Béthizy's undaunted impudence, he should be enabled to pursue the subject with Lord Lorimer after his departure. But scarcely had the heiress-hunter galloped off on his road towards Sir Thomas Westland's, when Frederick, looking towards the clock of the Horse Guards, exclaimed that he should be too late at the Foreign Office; and taking a hasty leave of his friend, he proceeded rapidly on his errand. Charles Willingham, although deeply chagrined at this disappointment, consoled himself with the certainty of their meeting on the following day. Meanwhile he returned home, and prepared him-

self to encounter his sister's interrogatories, in a state of mind still more perplexed than ever. If Minnie's affections were indeed thus deeply pledged, what mattered it to him whether Lord Lorimer or Lord Stapylford were the successful pretender to her hand? While, as far as regarded her own future prospects of happiness, he would have preferred a thousandfold to see her become the wife of the honourable and excellent Frederick. It was a long time since he had recurred to Lord Stapylford's former malefactions with so earnest an abhorrence as that which took possession of his heart between his interview with Lord Lorimer and his return to Grosvenor Square.

Meanwhile, although a feeling of jealous pique had induced Mr. Willingham to declare his belief that Miss de Vesci had become indifferent to the success of his embassy to Lord Barringhurst, and although Minnie herself, in the premature return of her youthful guardian, and the extraordinary trepidation of her cousin, had found subjects of personal interest peculiarly engrossing—it is not to be imagined that she could overlook the affectionate promptitude with which her commission had been executed, or withhold her sympathy from the joy experienced among the friends of poor Lucy, on occasion of the concessions obtained by Charles Willingham's interposition. During the whole of the afternoon her thoughts were continually wandering to the interview which she had found, from her cousin, to be already appointed between the guilty mother and her long-estranged daughters. She knew that Lord Barringhurst, being unwilling to render the event a subject of discussion in his household, or of vexation to his wife, had conditioned that Lady Robert Lorton should call for Lucy and Georgiana, as if intent only upon a morning drive; and conduct them to Kensington—to the bosom of the dying penitent.

But if Miss de Vesci—young, and guiltless, and happy—found matter for anxiety and tearful emotion, in the mere imagination of the scene that must ensue from such a meeting, what was the thrilling agony of soul—the heart-stirring tumult of feeling with which Lucy herself contemplated the promised arrival of her children! Lady Robert

had lost no time in forewarning her of the approaching realisation of her eager hopes; and it was many hours after the arrival of the propitious messenger, before the sufferer could divest herself of an apprehension that the whole project must be some delirious coinage of her brain.

She exerted herself to rise, and strove to subdue the irritating excitement of her nerves, by busily arraying herself to meet these promised, these precious visiters. But her trembling hands refused their accustomed office: as she attempted to fasten a string, or bind back her scattered hair, she became again and again overpowered by anticipations of the happiness that awaited her; and hysteric tears and hysteric laughter gave utterance to the bewildering oppression of her heart. "My children—my dear, dear children!" she exclaimed again and again, with frantic vehemence; folding her arms across her bosom, with an unconscious gesture,—as if already embracing the restored darlings of her tenderness!

By some delusion of feeling—some strange perplexity of thought—Lucy had never learned to consider her daughters otherwise than they had appeared at the moment of her flight. As a mother, bereaved by death of the child of her affections, continues to regard it throughout her afterlife as her babe, her youngling—infantine as when snatched from her arms into the grave,—so Lucy, to whom her daughters had long been as the lost and the dead, could never teach herself to think of them, saving as the little Lucy and the little Georgiana she had deserted; —their original image remained in her mind, unobliterated by the knowledge of any subsequent period;—they were still the thoughtless, happy, lovely, and beloved children, whom she had so fondly cherished in her days of innocence;—her tenderness disavowed the picture of their progress towards womanhood, which the importunate hand of reason would sometimes present.

The day advanced—the meridian sun shone brightly into the chamber of sickness; and as her spirits rose or sank into depression, Lucy alternately fancied that its beams appeared to deride her shame and expose her wretchedness,—or to cheer her soul and bring promise of hap-

pier times. Sometimes she prayed in humble and penitential agony; sometimes the prospects of her gratified affection irradiated her pale face with involuntary smiles; sometimes she wept with the unresisting feebleness of an infant. At the sound of every approaching vehicle, she started from her couch; but only to cower back again with shuddering tremour, as disappointment and humiliation resumed their influence!

At length a carriage stopped at her gate. The well-known voice and well-known step of Lady Robert Lorton were heard on the stairs: it seemed as if she were giving time, by this announcement, for Lucy to prepare herself for the interview.

Prepare herself for such a moment! Could weeks, could years of preparation afford sufficient fortitude for the endurance of such a crisis? The breath scarcely hovered upon the sufferer's lips;—her heart beat faintly, as if its office were nearly ended;—when the door was gently opened, and two tall, elegant young women advanced towards her.

"My Lucy!—my Georgiana!"—murmured the agonised mother. But when she looked upon the maturity of her lovely daughters—when she felt herself placed before them—guilty—dishonoured—a fallen woman in presence of their innocence—she sank unconsciously upon her knees at their feet. All her purposed endearments were forgotten in the overpowering consciousness of humiliation.

"Forgive me, forgive me!" she faltered, as the Miss Barringhursts, bending over her, would have assisted her to rise.

"My own dear mother!" exclaimed the agitated girls, while they bathed her with their tears.

"Forgive me!" whispered the sufferer in a still fainter voice; and sliding from their embrace, she fell prostrate on the floor.

Lady Robert Lorton flew to their assistance. But all was over! The purified spirit had been released in that last struggle between penitence and maternal tenderness! The soul of Lucy had entered into its rest!

CHAPTER XII.

"Such things, perhaps, we 'd best discuss within,"
Said he; "don't let us make ourselves absurd
In public, by a scene, nor raise a din;
For then the chief and only satisfaction
Will be much quizzing on the whole transaction." BEPPO.

On the day of these eventful passages, Lisborough House was not without its share in the general agitation. The duke, who had long been voted by his male friends to be among the most miserable victims of conjugal oppression —who was sneered at by the witlings of every fashionable club as the most hen-pecked of his species—found himself condemned to a more than ordinary cruelty of martyrdom. He was now so well accustomed to Anastasia's sullenness—so thoroughly inured to her dignified silence in a *tête-à-tête*, whenever she chanced to be out of sorts with the world, or indigestive, or "nervous" (the polite definition of *ill-tempered*)—that he had ceased to court her from her fits of the pouts, or to express either surprise or regret at her abrupt distemperature.

But the duchess was not only afflicted, on the present occasion, with one of her most distressing attacks of sulky resignation, but had summoned Lady Barringhurst and Lady Grayfield to be the witnesses of her sufferings. The duke augured but ill for his own peace, when he found that the mysterious trio had been closeted in Anastasia's boudoir during the whole of the morning; and, taking courage from a persuasion that her grace would exert some command over her temper in the presence of her female friends, he presented himself suddenly among them, to acquaint his oppressed wife that his cabriolet was at the door; and that, as the society of Lady Barringhurst and of his sister would ensure her from a solitary dinner, he should take a cutlet at the "Travellers," with his friend Mr. Russell, in order to be in time for the overture of "Il Piata."

"If you have made no very urgent engagement with your friend, and if your eagerness can bring itself to endure a few days of procrastination in this important

matter, you would oblige me very much by remaining at home to-day," said the duchess, with the most provoking air of humility.

"Certainly, certainly," replied the duke, with great good humour. "I am proud to find that my company is regarded as any thing better than importunate by your little sociable party."

"Sociable! — I fear you will find us a very insufficient substitute for the wit of Mr. Conversation-Russell, and the modest refinement of Lady Rachel Verney! Neither Lady Grayfield nor myself are skilled in the sort of flippant repartee which you prize in my sister, Lady Robert, and adore in Lady Cosmo Somerset and the Willinghams; and as to poor dear Lady Barringhurst, Heaven knows that the state of *her* spirits is very little calculated to indulge in the levity with which Lady Rachel Verney and your fashionable friends are apt to enliven their discourse."

The duchess ostentatiously pressed the hand of her afflicted companion, as she uttered these words; and both Charlotte and Lady Barringhurst tenderly echoed the profound sigh with which she concluded her harangue. All three appeared intent on being miserable: — with elevated eyebrows, depressed mouths, and downcast eyes, they sat like statues of patience; and the Duke of Lisborough trembled as he thought upon the evening that awaited him among these dispirited and uncommunicative females! He did not, however, dare to rebel; and even had Anastasia been Chaucer's Wife of Bath herself, redeemed from the grave, he could not have listened with humbler forbearance to the sage axioms touching the cruelty of husbands, and the unprincipled inhumanity of the whole masculine race, with which he was favoured during dinner by his wife and her guests. Something was evidently wrong; yet he had not courage to enquire by what accident Lady Barringhurst chanced to be unaccompanied by her lord, or by his daughters. He was aware there must have been "a quarrel, but nothing wherefore;" and the poor duke grew desperate when the lateness of the hour compelled him to call for coffee, and adjourn to the boudoir and its inhabitants.

The three ladies, who had been engaged in earnest argument on his approach, affected to subdue themselves into silence as he entered; and finding his utmost efforts vain to engage them in conversation, he took up a number of the "Edinburgh Review," and ensconcing himself in a *fauteuil*, either seemed or strove to read, in order to disguise his impatience of their peevish affectation. But he had not courage to break the spell and fly off to the opera; he felt at once the irksomeness of the chain, and his own insufficiency to rend it asunder.

An awful silence ensued—broken only by an occasional whisper among the female martyrs, still more awful; and the duke was beginning to feel as if an invisible chain had been flung around him, to bind him to his schoolboy seat of punishment, and to become mightily ashamed of the ridiculous humiliation of his position, when the groom of the chambers suddenly announced "Lord Barringhurst." The Duke of Lisborough joyfully hastened to welcome this opportune arrival; but during the moment of his delay in the anteroom a strange degree of confusion had been evident among the allied forces, and he had overheard both the duchess and Lady Grayfield whisper to their coadjutrix, "Now—now—is your moment for firmness."

Lord Barringhurst having paid his compliments with his accustomed air of dignified indifference to the duke and duchess, turned abruptly, but not ungraciously, towards his wife, observing, "I have brought the carriage, Milicent, to take you home:—I fear it is late."

"Thank you," replied Lady Barringhurst, assuming a tone of magnanimous disdain, "but I have just promised my friend, the duchess, to *sleep* here to-night: we intend passing to-morrow at Ebury."

"I trust you will alter that determination," said Lord Barringhurst, with gentle gravity, "when I make it my particular request that you will accompany me home."

Lady Barringhurst appeared staggered by the seriousness of his air; but an encouraging glance from her privy counsellors urged her to still further resistance.

"On some occasions, I trust, I may be allowed to consult my own comfort and respectability."

"Milicent!" said Lord Barringhurst, accepting the seat which he had hitherto declined, "I came not hither with any unkind feelings towards you; I entertain no resentment against yourself or your advisers. But I have been already too deep a sufferer from want of energy in my domestic conduct to pass over your resistance on the present occasion. Do not leave the room, my dear duke! I wish you to be the witness of an explanation which Lady Barringhurst has chosen to render public; I may, perhaps, avail myself hereafter of your testimony that I have employed no harsh methods in the expression of my displeasure."

Lady Barringhurst now began to look alarmed; but Anastasia's contracted countenance assumed an air of haughty defiance.

"You could scarcely expect to find me under your roof," said Lady Barringhurst, with a sort of apologising deprecation, "after you had broken your promise to me, and sanctioned the clandestine visits of your daughters in a quarter most offensive to my feelings."

"Whatever measures I might have thought proper to sanction, I expected to find my wife acquiescent in their execution. I expected, Milicent, to find her fulfilling her accustomed duties in our common home; and you must make up your mind either to return there this night—or to return there no more."

Lady Barringhurst started! But her female prompters, although they pursed up their mouths with an air of indignant displeasure, no longer ventured to encourage her to opposition. The duchess, in particular, was furious that so vile an example of matrimonial tyranny should have been offered to the submissive Lisborough.

"You are displeased," continued Lord Barringhurst, "that I have permitted an interview to take place between my daughters and their mother, in opposition to your own opinions. Permit me to recapitulate the arguments by which my own disinclination to the measure was shaken by my young friend Mr. Willingham, and which you disdained to hear, in explanation, this morning."

The duchess made a gesture expressive of impatience and disgust.

"Your grace will excuse me for thus intruding my family affairs on your notice; but as Lady Barringhurst's friend, I feel secure of your indulgence."

Anastasia, astonished by the rebuke, was not yet daunted in spirit. "Pray speak on, my lord," said she, haughtily. "I am anxious to learn in what manner that mighty orator, Mr. Willingham, contrived to persuade you of the worthiness of the lady in question to become the companion of the Miss Barringhursts."

"By satisfying me of my own *un*worthiness;—by proving to me, madam, that the errors of the unfortunate Lucy arose solely from my own!" Lord Barringhurst uttered these trying words without agitation; but his face was pale as death, and his voice concentrated into a tone of the deepest pathos.

"When I became the husband of one of the noblest and loveliest women in England," he resumed, after a brief pause, "my gratitude for her affection, my sense of conjugal duty, ought to have rendered her interests paramount in my estimation. Yet, under a mistaken feeling of responsibility to the public and to my country, I neglected my own household — I absented myself from my happy home — I estranged my heart from the mother of my children, from the wife of my choice. I *knew* that libertines were welcomed within my doors, yet uttered no remonstrance; — I was aware that the attractive and licentious were my frequent guests, yet I strove not to forewarn my lovely Lucy by one reproving word."

Again Lord Barringhurst paused;—and a pin might have been heard to fall in the chamber; so deep was the sympathy of his auditors in the dignified command he laboured to exercise over his emotions.

"Even when the indiscretions of Mr. Tichborne and his cousin had been pointed out to me, Milicent, by your own interposition, I forbore to exercise the degree of firmness becoming the occasion. Occupied by my ambitious projects or selfish pursuits, I slighted my wife — over-

looked her attachment to another; nor vouchsafed to bestow my attention on the subject, until a dread of the compromise of my honour in the eyes of the world prompted me to acts of violence which only served to ensure the eventual ruin of their hitherto innocent object. Lady Barringhurst became the prey of a libertine—and the world pronounced me to be an injured man; I divorced her—and the world declared me to be a just one!"

Lord Barringhurst involuntarily clasped his hands together.

"By this public act of repudiation my cause was fully avenged; and I satisfied my conscience, meanwhile, by the belief that a woman who had been lawfully put away as an adulteress can maintain no further claim upon the affection of her children. In this resolution, Milicent, I was fortified by your representations of poor Lucy's degradation as the avowed paramour of Henry Tichborne;—a point on which you deceived me, or were yourself deceived."

"It is not to be supposed," observed the duchess, coldly, "that the movements and engagements of persons so disgracefully situated should be very accurately ascertained among the virtuous part of the community."

"True," replied Lord Barringhurst. "Nor can such persons be supposed to remain objects of interest, saving unto those with whom their days of innocence were passed in the happy interchange of affection, or unto those who believe themselves to have been instrumental in their fall. Your grace must pardon me for assuring you that no man can wholly estrange from his recollection the wife who has lain in his bosom! And, however you may despise me for the confession, I acknowledge that my heart was gladdened and re-assured by the intelligence imparted to me by Mr. Willingham, this morning, that Lucy Tichborne has been as distinguished by the humbleness of her penitence as by the flagrancy of her offence."

"Mr. Willingham may perhaps be a partial judge," observed Lady Grayfield maliciously.

"Lady Robert Lorton—one of the most discerning and virtuous of her sex—was, in this instance, his authority; and to her earnest entreaties that I would permit a single

—a final interview—between her dying friend and my daughters, she added a proposal of being present at the meeting. Rejoiced to offer some expiation to one whose errors I cannot but trace to my own injudicious carelessness, I acquiesced in Lady Robert's wishes, without insulting Lady Barringhurst by any further allusion to a topic distressing to her feelings; and Lucy and Georgiana accompanied her ladyship this morning to — to — the presence of their miserable mother."

"At least there can be no occasion for a repetition of the visit," observed the duchess. "Having satisfied your conscience by this concession, your lordship surely cannot contemplate a repetition of this very equivocal measure."

"On this point, Milicent," said Lord Barringhurst, turning towards his wife, "your apprehensions may subside. My daughters are secure from future corruption — yourself from further irritation!—*Lucy is dead!*"

All present uttered an exclamation of horror; and the females of the party began to think that they had carried their pharisaical animosity towards the offender a little too far.

"My daughters will remain this night and to-morrow under the protection of Lady Robert Lorton, that they may not offend you by the sight of their tears; or the opinion of the world, by their respect to the memory of one who, with all her faults, was a tender mother to their childhood. On the following day, Lucy's remains will be laid by the side of her father, in his family vault; and with them be all our resentments — all our unpleasing remembrances — buried for ever. *You*, Milicent, must assist me, as a good wife should, in the task of forgetting my former grievances."

He held out his hand affectionately as he spoke; and Lady Barringhurst, touched by his affliction, and moved by his kindness, gratefully accepted the pledge. After all, her better nature rendered her but a poor scholar to the harsh and aristocratic coldness of Lady Grayfield — who despised her for this act of feeble compliance.

But if Milicent's feelings were overcome by the mournful intelligence imparted by her lord, those of the Duke of Lisborough were far more earnestly excited by the lofty

sternness of purpose he had exhibited in his adjustment of the affair. Lord Barringhurst's conduct had sufficed to place his own in the meanest and most paltry light. He now felt thoroughly ashamed of his subjection to Anastasia's whims, and resolved to disemburden himself henceforward of her yoke; and the duchess, in marking the altered expression of his countenance, perceived at once that the reign of terror was at an end — that her kingdom had been taken from her! She could not disguise her vexation and discomposure; and when her guests had departed, she made a hasty retreat into her dressing-room, lest the duke should break forth into a verbal declaration of future independence.

The daughters who were weeping over their mother's coffin — Lady Robert, who was grieving beside the remains of her friend — Milicent Barringhurst, who was moistening her pillow with the bitter tears of remorse — may be imagined to have passed the ensuing night in sleepless sorrow; but the restlessness of the Duchess of Lisborough outpassed their own. Mortified, perplexed, and alarmed, she endured all the tortures prepared for a malicious temper in its first moment of defeat.

CHAPTER XIII.

A young unmarried man with a good name
And fortune has an awkward part to play;
For good society is but a game,
"The royal game of goose" as I may say —
Where every body has some separate aim,
And end to answer or a plan to lay —
The single ladies wishing to be double. BYRON.

"AND so you really think of walking into the springe with your eyes open!" said Lord Lorimer to Sir Comyne Wallace, as they lounged together over the newspapers at the Travellers' Club. "After all your former admonitory dissertations to me upon the interested views and heartless character of the Willinghams, you really think of honouring the fair Eleanor with your hand!"

"I suppose you wish to ascertain, in the words of our Scottish bard,

How your old shoon fit on my shauchled feet?"

"I am only sorry to find you struggling in a pitfall, which your forewarnings enabled me to escape."

"No, my dear fellow! I do *not* struggle in my chains; trust me, I am well aware that resistance serves but to tighten the links. I resign myself patiently to my destiny, believing, on mature deliberation, that Eleanor and myself, without having any chance of becoming the happiest of human beings, are likely to run the ordinary course of human life with a tolerable likelihood of adding to our mutual comfort."

"A very sober and moderate expectation!"

"And therefore trustworthy! During his days of youthful enthusiasm every man promises himself a career of perfect happiness—of stainless respectability—of matchless honour. We flatter ourselves that the world will reform itself for our sake: we anticipate a faultless monster in our future bride; and cheat ourselves with the expectation, that the even current of our destinies will flow over sands of gold! Alas! the first self-deception we are compelled to resign becomes a bitter trial to our fortitude; but, one after another, we see these cherished visions fade away—we inure ourselves to the degree of mediocrity which is our allotted portion—and finally learn to be contented with such dirty scraps as the charity of fortune throws in our way. I do not uphold Eleanor Willingham as a model of womanly perfection, or as likely to make a pattern wife, but she *suits* me; and I have no hesitation in owning to you, Lorimer, that I have serious thoughts of proposing to your old love."

"You will scarcely suppose that jealous or interested motives induce me to dissuade you from such a measure, when I confess that I am attached, and more than half engaged, in another quarter; but I cannot bear to see you the prey of a determined match-hunter."

"You are not an impartial judge on this occasion;—you cannot forget or forgive the coquettish caprices practised upon you by poor Eleanor. To myself, however, her conduct has been so uniformly kind and encouraging, that——"

"Doubtless—doubtless!—for she had her own object in view in the concession; she was kind and encouraging

to *me*, till she had discovered the diminutive amount of my younger brother's portion! Nay, I entertain no doubt of renewing her kindness and encouragement to-morrow, if I chose to make the experiment."

"I wish you *would* make the experiment, in order that your pride might be repressed, and my expectations gratified."

"*Ca va!*" exclaimed Lord Lorimer, touching the hand of his friend. "As far as the devotion of a couple of days will serve your turn, I am at your service; but I have pleasures of my own to pursue, which are better than these plots. For the sake of my personal hopes elsewhere, I must 'come, see, and conquer' Miss Eleanor without delay; to-night, therefore, at Lady Radbourne's ball expect to find me your rival."

"Here comes Basingstoke! Why do you not employ your rhetoric upon him? Claudia, it is true, never practised her coquetries upon your boyhood; but she is surely as much of an establishment-hunter as her sister?"

"Far more so, in my opinion! But Basingstoke never was my monitor in a similar predicament; nor does he, at present, need any warning of mine. His proposals were yesterday accepted, by Lord Barringhurst, for his youngest daughter."

"Impossible! — quite impossible. My dear Basingstoke, for pity's sake, resolve me this mystery! — The world wants to marry you in a great hurry; — do you forbid the bans?"

"By no means — unless you have prior pretensions to urge against me; — I am weary of flirting and folly; and nothing can be more true than that I am about to try the old English diet of love and home, by retiring to Basingstoke Manor ——"

"With Claudia Willingham? — I said so!"

"With Miss Willingham? A pretty sort of home, and a very satisfactory species of love you would assign me! — Like the hunted beaver in the fable, I should throw my coronet at her and run away, rather than fall into her hands. I am far too vain to have any fancy for finding

my patent and my rent-roll preferred before my own attractions."

"But you have always appeared to admire Claudia — you were constantly at the house."

"Admire her? — of course! — Who could look at her lovely face without admiration? I consider the beauty and accomplishments of the Willinghams — set forth as they are by lavish display — to be the property of society at large. I bestow my applause and interest upon them, as I would upon some finished actress; and I have been, as you say, a constant lounger in Lady Maria's house, because I have been constantly invited there, and have uniformly found it a pleasant resort."

"Nevertheless, I suspect you will find your defection resented as an injury by the family."

"Perhaps so; but believe me, it will be on insufficient grounds. Never have I uttered one syllable which could give them reason to believe I had any matrimonial views in seeking their society. Claudia, on the contrary, has constantly rallied me on my supposed attachment to Lady Clara Radbourne; while Lady Maria Willingham herself, being on intimate terms with the Barringhursts, must have been fully aware of my attentions in that quarter. And now, good-by; for I am engaged to ride with Georgiana at three; and I am not inclined to forfeit one moment of the privilege."

"I wish him joy of this lukewarm love, and humdrum home," said Sir Comyne, as Lord Basingstoke left the room. "For my part, I should expect to find myself converted into a mass of millefleurs ice, were I to marry the pupil of such a precisian as Lady Barringhurst the second."

"While *I* should apprehend more danger in becoming the son of such a latitudinarian as Lady Barringhurst the first!"

"How, then, have you reconciled your uneasy conscience to your union with Miss de Vesci? How shall you like such a world-mongering semi-sinner, semi-saint, as Lady Maria, for your mother-in-law?"

"Miss de Vesci? — Lady Maria? Oh! are you *there*, my dear Wallace?" replied Lord Lorimer, laughing. "Do you really suppose that I have enacted my part of guardian, like the greybeard don of some Spanish farce; and appropriated my rich and lovely ward to my unworthy self?"

"Her sisters believe in your engagement."

"So they do in Basingstoke's attachment to Claudia, but they might extend their scepticism to both instances."

"Do you really assure me that you have no thoughts of allying yourself to the Willingham family?" enquired Sir Comyne earnestly, as they had now reached the hall, and were about to separate.

"I have said no such thing," answered Lorimer, still laughing, as he jumped upon his horse. "On the contrary, I am now on my road home to obtain my mother's consent to my union with — Miss Willingham. Wish me success — keep my secret — and fare you well."

With wonderstruck consternation, Sir Comyne Wallace stood watching his departure till he turned the corner of St. James's Street; then, slowly following his track, he ascended that mighty thoroughfare of the vagrancy of fashion, wholly abstracted from the interests of the passing scene; and much marvelling whether Lord Lorimer had returned from Naples in a condition worthy of a strait-waistcoat, or deserving to be shot through the heart for treachery towards himself. During the remainder of the day, he continued to puzzle his mind with guesses as to the sanity of his friend; but, when he entered Lady Radbourne's resplendent ball-room at night, and detected Lorimer in the act of whispering tender nothingness into the ear of his own Eleanor, he was inclined to overlook his morning's invitation to that effect; and to resent at once his lordship's attentions, and Miss Willingham's cordial acceptance of his devotion.

Irritated by the fickleness of Eleanor, and resolved to satisfy himself beyond the power of misconception, he advanced towards the guilty pair, who were seated on a sofa in the deep embrasure of a window, and engaged in a most determined flirtation. But the lady, who on all previous

occasions, and on every other night of the week, could espy him amid the crowd from the first moment of his entrance, now grew so wondrously near-sighted, that she fixed her listless eyes upon his countenance without a single symptom of recognition. But Sir Comyne would not be thus easily baffled; he placed himself before her — and was rewarded by a calm languid smile of notice; — he claimed her hand for the next quadrille — for the following *galoppe* — for the ensuing waltz; and was refused with polite equivocation upon every renewed attempt. He turned indignantly away, from an apprehension of encountering Lord Lorimer's triumphant glances; for, alas! the fatal fact was now only too evident! His day of favour was past and gone; — the baronet was forced to cede his place to the baron; and Frederick was now all in all with the calculating Eleanor. It was not, however, the lover of her youth whom she preferred; it was Lord Lorimer, who appeared too good a match to be neglected!

Poor Sir Comyne walked too and fro during the remainder of the ball, occasionally watching the offending couple, and unceasingly pitying himself as the most injured of mankind. Early on the following morning he betook himself to Mr. Willingham's snuggery in the Albany (he had been the successor to Sir William Wyndham's bachelor tenement), in order to give vent to his ill-humour; and to obtain, if possible, some further insight into the motives of Lord Lorimer's extraordinary behaviour.

But Charles, although as jealously disposed as Wallace himself to put the most unfavourable construction on every action of their common friend and mutual enemy, became still more and more perplexed by this fresh instance of Frederick's volatility. His whole conduct was a tissue of mysteries; he was evidently attached to Mary — engaged to Minnie — and inclined to play the fool with Eleanor; and as brother to one party, and cousin to the other two, Mr. Willingham felt himself entitled to demand some further explanation on the subject. With friendly sympathy he promised Sir Comyne to set his mind at ease by acquainting him with the result. But the irritated Wallace professed himself to be perfectly indifferent on the subject,

excepting as it concerned his future intimacy with Lord Lorimer; for however Frederick might frame his own vindication, the treachery of Eleanor Willingham was undeniably apparent: she had been ready, on the slighest invitation to withdraw her smiles from one whose disinterested regard she had long affected to favour, in order to bestow them on some higher bidder. No! Eleanor was not to be forgiven!

It would have been better, perhaps, had Sir Comyne accepted Mr. Willingham's gratuitous offers of explanation upon this knotty point. Thanks to the cordial candour of Lord Lorimer in replying to the appeal of his friend, it proved to be equally luminous and satisfactory; for although Charles had very little reason to be surprised on learning that Frederick's attachment for his sister Mary had been of slow but undeviating growth, he was wonderfully astonished to find that Sir Joseph had already sanctioned Lord Lorimer's proposals; and that Miss Willingham herself had received them on the preceding evening with signal favour. Mary had not judged it necessary to acknowledge to her new lover, during how many years his affection had been painfully despaired of on her part; nor how truly she was satisfied it would suffice to form the happiness of her future life. She could scarcely be persuaded that Frederick's engagements with Miss de Vesci had been a mere chimera of her own and her brother's imagination: but when he assured her that Minnie had long been the confidante of his love and of his projects — that during her residence at Naples she had confirmed them by her untiring details of cousin Mary's excellence, of cousin Mary's endowments, and, above all, of cousin Mary's faithful regard for his absent self — she could not repress her blushes and her amazement. She even blundered into a declaration that nothing but Minnie's previous attachment to Lord Stapylford could account for her indifference towards her guardian, and for her disinterested promotion of his marriage with another.

"But is it possible," exclaimed Lord Lorimer, too discreet to acknowledge how deeply he was gratified by this inadvertent inference,—"is it possible that you still remain

unaware of the state of Miss de Vesci's feelings with regard to Stapylford. Are you not yet in her confidence?"

"Perhaps I have too studiously avoided it. Notwithstanding all the flatteries you have been lavishing upon me for the last three hours, you must retain a sufficient remembrance of all the quarrels of our childhood, Frederick, to know that I am rich in all the failings of my sex—in envy, and jealousy, and——"

"In jealousy! Dearest Mary—*will* you, *do* you gratify me by insinuating that you were jealous of my supposed attachment to your cousin?"

"A little;—a very little!" replied Miss Willingham, with a smiling blush. "I thought it strangely ungrateful, considering that the constancy of mine was suffered to pass unregarded."

"My own dear Mary!—may the devotion of my whole life serve to repair even the semblance of such a fault!"

"And then I was disposed to be equally envious and jealous on Charles's account; whom I have long believed to be secretly devoted to—but I have no right to give utterance to these vague suggestions of my own fancy."

"Pray, go on!—I am more interested than you can imagine to learn your opinions on this subject. Besides—I have now a claim to participate in all your thoughts—ay! dear Mary, in all your most secret thoughts. Tell me, then, have you any reason for supposing that your brother is attached to my ward?"

"No *reason*, perhaps; but it is a folly which strangely possesses my mind. Charles's doubts and misgivings respecting Minnie's engagements with Lord Stapylford appear to distract him."

"Not more so than they distract herself," said Lord Lorimer, half aside; and it was but a few hours after this interview that Mr. Willingham sought the explanation prompted by Sir Comyne Wallace, which terminated so perfectly to his own satisfaction, and to that of his friend.

"But tell me, Frederick," observed Charles Willingham, after having warmly expressed his delight in the prospect of a brotherly connection with Lord Lorimer,—"tell me whence could have arisen all my strange misconceptions on this occasion?"

"From an obliquity of mental vision."

"But surely I overheard you refer, in conversation with Monsieur de Béthizy, to some engagement on the part of my cousin?"

"Certainly! to an engagement with Lord Stapylford; you cannot be ignorant of its existence."

"Of its continuance, I was willing to remain in doubt."

"Without violating the confidence of my ward, I may at least inform you that her sentiments on this head are only too delicately scrupulous. Upon her unexpected accession of fortune, she empowered me to write to Lord Stapylford, acquainting him with the fact; and begging an immediate explanation of his intentions. We are just now anxiously waiting the return of the India fleet, in order to learn the result of my communication."

Mr. Willingham almost ground his teeth with vexation at the idea of Miss de Vesci's thus courting the acceptance of her recreant lover! That Minnie, with all her loveliness, with all her good gifts, and all their worldly enhancement, should thus sue for the tardy fulfilment of a degrading engagement, was indeed incomprehensible!

"And can you believe," persisted he, "that the affections of my cousin are really engaged in this inauspicious connection?—If I could persuade myself that Minnie truly loved Lord Stapylford, or that so selfish a dog—so mean, so contemptible a fellow could render her happy—I would reconcile myself to the event. Resolve my doubts, Lorimer: do you think that Miss de Vesci is seriously attached to the man she seeks as her husband?"

"My dear, good Charles!—your warmth is unbecomingly prone to epithets this morning; and you do me injustice in supposing that I would betray the trust reposed in my discretion. I have told you more than enough; and now let me go back to the drawing-room, and talk to your sister. Remember that I have been parted from her these two years; and that whether Minnie is or is not attached to that *vaurien* Lord Stapylford, my own affection for Mary Willingham is as fervent as it is faithful."

"Thank Heaven, there is at least some prospect of happiness among us!" muttered Mr. Willingham in reply.

And he took up his hat to travel towards Westminster, with a mind very little disposed to cogitate over the interests of the nation, as discussed in the High Court of Parliament of Great Britain.

CHAPTER XIV.

Wise or foolish before, we are all equally foolish in love; the same froward, petulant, captious babies! I protest we are very silly creatures all of us, in these circumstances; and did not love make men as great fools as ourselves, they would hardly think us worthy of their pursuit. Yet I am so true to the freemasonry myself, that I would think the man who should dare to say half I have written of our *dollships* ought not to go away with his life.

RICHARDSON'S *Grandison.*

MONSIEUR DE BÉTHIZY, intimately persuaded of the amiability of his own condescension in smiling upon a young person so totally unknown to fame as Miss Arabella Westland, and satisfied that she could not remain blind to her own good fortune in being thus undeservedly honoured, gave himself very little trouble in pursuing what he considered to be his courtship in Portland Place. He sometimes even feared that the "*pauvre petite*" — who by the way was nearly as large as a bison — would be overcome by a sense of the vastness of the sacrifice he was making in her favour; and that she never would have courage to encounter the greatness he was willing to thrust upon her. He persuaded himself that the poor creature would certainly have taken refuge in Ophelia's remedy, had he continued to vibrate between his choice of herself or of Miss de Vesci; and being willing to put her out of her pain as soon as possible, he very cavalierly addressed his proposals to her father shortly after his explanation with Lord Lorimer.

Now Sir Thomas Westland was what is familiarly called in England "a bit of a humorist:" like many other vulgar persons, he had a singular tendency towards the jocose; and being tolerably aware of the true nature of Monsieur de Béthizy's views upon his daughter, he could not but be gratified with the opportunity of disappointing his cupidity. In the mean time he quite overlooked the

fact that his interested speculations upon the forfeiture of Miss de Vesci's fortune had first introduced the young Frenchman within his gates; and believing his own eyes to be clear from mote or beam, he applied himself without hesitation to work the humiliation of Arabella's fortune-hunting suitor. Under pretence of consulting the other members of his family, he hastily summoned his nephew, Sir Richard, into their cabinet-council; being well aware that he was sentimentally engaged in another apartment, in rendering his *own* suit acceptable to the ears of his well-portioned cousin; and that he would be eager to resent the intrusion of the handsome *double* of the Duke of Saxe-Altenburg into his self-appropriated territory.

Sir Thomas boldly proceeded to relate to his nephew, in Monsieur de Béthizy's presence, the honour destined to his Arabella, of patching the tattered escutcheous of the house of Béthizy with her solid English dowry; and affected to ask his advice as to the best method of inclining Miss Westland towards the prompt acceptance of so affable a proposition; and while Béthizy sat by, hugging himself in the grovelling folly of the old citizen, yet half ashamed to find him fix thus eagerly on the bait, Sir Thomas was slily amusing himself by watching the gradual swell of his nephew's dissatisfaction, and the final hurricane of indignation with which he marked his consciousness of the insult offered to their family in general by the young Parisian. Sir Richard Westland, as the co-guardian and frequent visiter of Miss de Vesci, had already found ample means of observing the manœuvres of Monsieur de Béthizy in Portman Square; and having at one time anticipated their success with the lovely heiress, he had learned to detest the interposing object which had seemed likely to frustrate the marriage with Lord Stapylford, a measure on the probability of which the Westlands still continued to ground their hopes of inheritance. But this disgust might have been regarded as affection, compared with that which followed Sir Richard's detection of his personal views upon Arabella.

Monsieur de Béthizy was one of those fortunate individuals who find it difficult to believe that any one can be

inclined to insult, or molest, or disparage their proper person. It is true that when a *real* offence was offered, he was most irritably disposed to resent the insolence of the offender; but in a thousand instances his self-love induced him to misinterpret the intentions of his adversaries. For a long time he continued to reply to the irony of old Sir Thomas by bows, and smiles, and entreaties that he would not rate too highly the honour of his proffered alliance; and even to the preliminary grumblings of Sir Richard he answered with amazing condescension. But before any final explanation had occurred between the parties, Lord Lorimer—who had business to transact with the Westlands on behalf of Miss de Vesci—entered Sir Thomas's library; and Monsieur de Béthizy, perceiving that the two gentlemen were about to wave the termination of his own affairs as a matter of delicacy towards himself, assured them that "Lorimare" was his best friend, and that he should be extremely happy to make him one of their counsellors on the present occasion.

"I see no object in extending the knowledge of your *conduct*, sir, or of your disappointment," replied Sir Richard, with a sneer.

"Am I to understand, Béthizy, that you have made an application for the hand of Miss Westland?" enquired Lord Lorimer, with a demure suppression of his risibility.

"Monsieur de Béthizy has done us that honour," replied Sir Thomas, who began to entertain more respect towards the young stranger, on finding Lord Lorimer to be his intimate friend. "But I fear the attachment existing between my daughter and her cousin Richard will deprive me of the distinction of ——"

"Distinction!" interrupted the ill-bred Sir Richard. "A distinction which Arabella has received in common with half a dozen other young ladies of equal fortune! Commend me to the delicacy of an attachment which depends solely upon the portion of the bride."

"Do you mean to insinuate," retorted Béthizy, "that my views upon Miss Westland——"

"And upon Miss de Vesci, Lady Mary Talbot, and Lady Bontein, have all been equally interested. You must par-

don me, sir, for observing that I consider the method in which French marriages are arranged among persons of condition to be very unworthy of imitation in our own country."

"I never was guilty of shooting a gentleman of *his* tone and dimensions," said Béthizy, half aside to Lord Lorimer, directing a shrug of contemptuous pity towards Sir Richard Westland. "I leave such animals to the *abattoir;* nor have I any thought of breaking a lance in honour of a pre-engaged lady."

Sir Thomas, who had been greatly displeased by his nephew's violence, was now moved by Monsieur de Béthizy's impertinent air of superiority to second the charge. "You must allow us to believe, sir, that the tribute of personal respect and esteem is due to any lady whom you seek in marriage. By rendering that holy institution a mere matter of traffic and barter, you degrade both the altar and yourself. Yes, sir, you must allow us to believe that we manage these matters better in England."

"I shall grant you no such concession," replied Béthizy, without losing his temper or his countenance. "I maintain, on the contrary, that the English nation is disgraced, in its female branches, by the manner in which matrimonial speculations are pursued in London. You have alluded to the conventional marriages of my own country—you call them interested and indelicate;—but what will you say in defence of a system which induces you to educate your daughters solely with a view to their future advancement?—You bring them into society—allow them to converse, and dance with, and pass whole hours leaning upon the arm of a comparative stranger, in order that they may put forth their attractions, and allure some man of importance into the snare. You initiate them into all those arguments of sordid interest by which the pure mind of youth should be wholly untainted; you give them permission to choose for themselves at an age when their own judgment cannot but prove a dangerous pilot; yet when their choice is made, you deign to sanction it only so far as your mature worldly wisdom may suggest. And this you call disinterestedness and delicacy in the affairs of the heart!"

"Nay, my dear Béthizy," exclaimed Lord Lorimer, "pray do not suppose that all our marriages are thus arranged, or that all English women are actuated by similar principles."

"I speak only of the class of society in which I move; and I am sure you will not deny that such girls as the Willinghams, and fifty others of equal notoriety, are as decidedly fortune-hunters as any adventurer or *chevalier d'industrie* upon record! In my opinion, nothing can exceed the gross indelicacy of a custom which sends forth young and lovely women to dispose of themselves to the best advantage; while our Parisian system leaves all the sin of sordid calculation with the parents, to whose old age avarice is a far less disgraceful distemper."

Sir Thomas Westland was unprovided with a reply of sufficient toughness and plausibility to be audibly uttered; and Sir Richard, who was half inclined to be pugnacious, but who felt afraid of provoking Monsieur de Béthizy's sarcastic and self-possessed impertinence, also maintained a sulky silence while the Parisian terminated his harangue.

"For my own part, I am far from wishing to conceal that I am not sufficiently rich to select a portionless wife; —that I am, in fact, anxious to ally myself with a woman of fortune; — I must otherwise remain in solitary blessedness to the end of my days. But I have something to offer in exchange for the thousands you value so highly; — an ancient name — parchments which reach from hence to the deluge — a tolerable person, and a tolerable degree of acceptance in society — good sense, good temper, good health, and good breeding. I do not ask you, gentlemen, to appreciate these advantages; — I am aware that they are commodities foreign to your commerce; but in taking my leave, I beg to suggest that you may hereafter find the fair Arabella inclined to regret their loss."

With a smiling bow of splendid disdain, Monsieur de Béthizy left the gorgeous apartment of the astonished banker, in order to pursue his fortunes elsewhere; kissing his fore-finger to Lord Lorimer as he passed, and whistling Rossini's Tyrolian as he jumped into his cabriolet.

Lord Lorimer's errand with the Westlands was de-

spatched without further reference to the speculative propensities of his Parisian friend. He was anxious to obtain certain signatures and certain concessions from his co-trustee, previous to the departure of Miss de Vesci for Bensleigh Park, whither she was about to retire for the summer months, accompanied by her mother and sisters. The announcement of Lord Basingstoke's ensuing marriage with Miss Barringhurst, and of his own with the gentle Mary Willingham, had, in fact, struck a finishing blow upon the expectations of Claudia and her sister. Even Sir Comyne Wallace, undeceived by his skilful exposition of Eleanor's cold-hearted policy, had withdrawn his assiduities; and thus, at the close of another season, and after more than their usual eagerness of manœuvring and allurement, they found themselves further than ever from the momentous goal they had believed to be securely attained on the present occasion. Lady Robert Lorton, profoundly affected by the death of her unfortunate friend, and somewhat moderated in her regard towards the Willinghams, by observing that during her secession from the pleasures of the world their attentions were considerably relaxed, had left London for Lord Robert's Buckinghamshire seat; where she trusted to remain unmolested by the Duchess of Lisborough's malicious comments, and by the intrusion of the Lady Wroxtons and Lady Radbournes, whose influence had proved so baneful to the unhappy Lucy. Her last visit of adieu was made to Mary Willingham, in gratitude for an interposition which she felt to have been most consolatory to the parting moments of her friend.

"I leave you at the summit of mortal happiness, my dear Miss Willingham," said she. "Time and absence, in trying the strength of your affection, have proved its worthiness; you possess at once all the happy associations of an early attachment—of a first love—and all the confidence arising from a maturer choice. The love by which your course has been guided has proved no blindfold Cupid; yet I venture to predict him a deity whose altars are sacred to happiness."

"Thank you, thank you!"—replied Mary, blushing to hear her sentiments thus positively defined. "I believe

—I trust—that my prospects are not the less bright for having been tardily developed. It is something, even at six-and-twenty, to have attained the accomplishment of our dearest wishes."

"*Something*, indeed!" replied Lady Robert, musingly; "for I know no human destiny more promising, more honourable, than your own. You have lingered in your home beyond the usual allotment of a woman's fate, and so as to achieve a perfect fulfilment of filial duty:—you have closed the eyes of one parent, and have ministered to the happiness of the survivor with the tenderest patience. Your brother—a discerning judge—regards you with no less reverence than affection; and even your cousins—without the courage to imitate them—respect your virtues. You have strictly restrained within your own bosom every demonstration of those emotions which other women assume as an embellishment—yet you are about to be united to the object of your earliest and tenderest affection!—You have shrunk from those displays by which other women attempt to secure a matrimonial establishment—yet you are about to form an alliance of the most brilliant description. The family of your future husband warmly acknowledge their gratification in seeing you become Lord Lorimer's wife; while in his mother you possess at once an amiable and enlightened companion, and the friend of your own free choice. What can mortal woman wish for more?"

"You are just in your estimate of my good fortune!" exclaimed Mary, touched almost to tears, "although you so flatteringly exaggerate the qualities by which you would teach me to believe myself entitled to the favours of Providence. But do not threaten me with a prospect so alarming as that of uninterrupted sunshine, or I shall believe myself to be singled out for some terrible reverse."

"Make yourself easy on that head; I shall easily discover some thorn concealed among your roses, which may save you the apprehension of a conflagration at Lorimer Hall, or of Frederick's elopement with an opera-dancer. Your brother, for instance;—I am by no means satisfied about your brother."

"Indeed!" said Mary, gazing with an anxious eye and heightened complexion upon her visiter. "What evil can you possibly anticipate on Charles's account?—Surely his prospects are as bright as my own?"

"I grant you that his temporal prospects are hopeful; for he has acquired, by his own abilities and principles, a degree of public consideration commensurate with the noble inheritance he derives from his forefathers. No one stands on a higher point of personal dignity than Mr. Willingham."

"Perhaps you think his manners too reserved, his character too grave, for popularity in general society?"

"Towards the stereotype opinion of that common-place thing called 'general society,' I conclude him to be as indifferent as myself. In his own circle he is worshipped; whenever he is at the pains of discovering himself, your brother cannot fail of being beloved. Throughout this unhappy affair of poor Lucy's, I cannot describe to you the delicacy, the judgment, the gentleness of feeling, with which Mr. Willingham has conciliated all parties; I have been forced into constant collision with him, and I can hardly express the grateful interest which moves my remembrance of his kindness, in negotiating between Lord Barringhurst and myself in all the melancholy intricacies of the business. But, as I said before, I am not satisfied on his account."

"You alarm me!—I have observed of late that Charles has been wretchedly out of spirits—and Frederick has noticed a considerable alteration in his appearance. I trust you do not think his health has been seriously affected by his unintermitted devotion to public business?"

"On the contrary, I suspect it is some *private* business which is preying upon his mind."

"Dear Lady Robert—surely——"

"Nay, do not alarm yourself! I have no clue to the mystery; and even my conjectures are not of a very terrific description—I believe him to be desperately in love."

"Indeed!" said Mary, greatly relieved. "Then I shall not agitate myself with any violent apprehensions!—I know, by experience, that even a hopeless attachment is

not a mortal disorder; and I cannot believe that a person so excellent, and so highly-gifted as my brother, will sigh in vain. But why should you imagine that a man of his serious and sober character is the victim to a sentimental passion?"

"In the first place, I have witnessed the determined self-control with which he has resisted all the cunning overtures of Lady Radbourne, and all the still more perilous advances of her beautiful daughter. Believe me, they have left no effort unattempted to make him their own."

"I fancy Charles entertains a view of the duties and affections of wedded life very different from any that could be afforded by an union with so fashionable a belle as Lady Clara Radbourne."

"There I perfectly agree with you. But Lucy Barringhurst is scarcely less lovely — far more accomplished; and has been educated in every respect with a view to the domestic happiness he prizes so highly. Now I happened to be present on the occasion of your brother's congratulations to Lord Barringhurst, on Georgiana's engagement with Basingstoke; and I scarcely know whether I felt more surprised by his lordship's insinuation that Mr. Willingham himself would prove more acceptable to him as a son-in-law than any man in England; or by Charles's embarrassment, and studious avoidance of encouraging the project. From that hour to this, I am persuaded he has never exchanged a syllable with Lucy Barringhurst."

"But his coldness towards one young lady offers very slight evidence of his attachment to another."

"Very true! and his avoidance of Lucy I ascribe simply to indifference. But there exists another, whose presence he shuns with still more determined circumspection, and on very different grounds; — one, too, from whose society he has no *right* to absent himself, unless from two motives — one or other of which must certainly instigate his conduct — *love* or *hatred*."

"Hatred, my dear Lady Robert! Do you suppose that Charles, or any other man, could *hate* a person so captivating as Minnie?"

"Ah! you have betrayed yourself and him! Your consciousness of my meaning assures me that I have guessed rightly on the present occasion."

"I will candidly own that my recent conjectures lead to a similar conclusion; but I am not in his secret. My brother probably imagines that Lord Lorimer's authority with my cousin has placed me in her confidence; for, although he knows how deeply—in common with all Miss de Vesci's friends—I lament her engagement to Lord Stapylford, yet he has never alluded to the subject, or mentioned Minnie's name in my presence since Frederick's return to England."

"He has acted with his usual delicacy. But must I imitate his discretion? May I not enquire whether your cousin persists in her girlish attachment?"

"Nay! You see her nearly as often as myself, and can as well determine."

"At least, you will tell me whether she considers herself engaged to the cold-hearted spendthrift, who has proved himself so undeserving of her love?"

"I fear she does; and, to own the truth, we are in immediate apprehension of Lord Stapylford's arrival. Minnie would have remained in town, to be present at my marriage with her guardian, but that the India fleet is hourly expected; and Lorimer wished her to be safe at Bensleigh till all the difficulties of the business are at an end."

"You acknowledge, then, that there *are* difficulties?"

"Do not ask me to be more explicit; time, I trust, will develope the affair to the satisfaction of all our friends; in the mean time, my brother remains as much in the dark as yourself."

"Poor Mr. Willingham!—I can now account for his sallow looks and desponding speeches!—Well! since you will not admit me further into the mystery, I must limit my interest in it to watching the weathercock on the turret of the Lorton House offices; and to praying for winds and tides favourable to the arrival of the India fleet. Pray put me out of my pain by giving me good tidings, as soon as

the event will allow. I do not insist that the letter should be signed with the name of WILLINGHAM; but I trust that Mary, the writer, will condescend to subscribe herself as my 'affectionate friend.'"

CHAPTER XV.

Les femmes se préparent pour leurs amants, si elles les attendent; mais si elles en sont surprises, elles oublient à leur arrivée l'état où elles se trouvent — elles ne se voient plus. Elles ont plus de loisir avec les indifférents; elles sentent le désorde où elles sont, s'ajustent en leur présence, ou disparoissent un moment, et reviennents parées. LA BRUYERE.

IT was a golden evening towards the end of August, and the setting sun was streaming in glorious effulgence through the entangled boughs of the beechen avenue of Bensleigh Park. A light sprinkling of rain in the afternoon had brought back the freshness of verdure and fragrance of atmosphere distinguishing the earlier summer; and although among the adjoining farms, the stubble whence the redundant shocks of corn had been recently removed, gave visible tokens of the advanced progress of the year, extensive fields of purple clover, flushed with bloom and overcharged with sweetness, still spoke of the genial maturity of the season. It was, in short, one of those delicious snatches of weather, which intervene between summer and autumn, partaking of the softness of the one, and the mellow richness of the other. The blackbirds poured forth their evening song among shrubberies fashioned according to the antique or Verulamian school of gardening; which exhibited straight gravel walks, protected by dense masses of evergreens — by impervious walls of ilex, and phillyrea and yew, and cypress; among whose leaves the lingering drops of the recent shower still glittered, and still called forth their spicy balminess.

The Willinghams had just ended their family dinner; and immediately on the conclusion of the dessert — a period devoted by Lady Maria to a private doze in the great arm chair of her dressing-room — Miss de Vesci had

stolen into the garden for the indulgence of a solitary walk. She felt that she had much need of being alone — to commune with her own thoughts — and reflect unmolested upon the extraordinary events which the intelligence of the day had served to develope. She had by that morning's post received letters of singular importance from her guardian! and she was now intent upon discovering the least embarrassing mode of acquainting her family with their contents.

Eleanor and Claudia, meanwhile, were seated, in sullen listlessness, in the old library; engaged, now in ransacking certain obsolete treatises upon archery, for some original costume to be assumed on occasion of an approaching toxophilite county-meeting; and now in gazing discontentedly upon the wide solitude of the park; — grumbling alternately against the busy tumult of the rookery — the monotonous rumble of a distant waterfall, and the occasional shrieks of a peculiar breed of peacocks, cherished by Miss de Vesci, as having been the favourites of her late uncle. They had no opportunity of discovering Minnie's retreat, that they might intrude upon her evening meditations; for the Bensleigh shrubberies lay basking under the southern front of the manor-house; — an old-fashioned mass of irregularity — perplexed with gables and abutments, and covered by the luxuriant growth of the passion-flower; — while the library in which they sat, overlooked the great western entrance, commanding the avenue and court-yard.

"What can exceed the bore of a great, unpeopled country-house like this?" exclaimed Eleanor, throwing away her book with an audible yawn. "No neighbourhood — no riding-parties — no pleasant drives — no music — no scandal! — Nothing in this wide world to save one from dying of the spleen, except the weekly appearance of the county newspaper, chronicling all the stolen sheep and gigantic turnips; and the daily arrival of the letter-bag, reminding us of pleasures in which we no longer participate."

"If Minnie were but like other people, and could be persuaded to fill the house with the society by which we

ought to be surrounded, these tedious months of retirement might be better endured."

"Or if the Lisboroughs would take it into their heads to spend part of the shooting-season at Lorton Hall, we should be secure of making it out till the commencement of the Brighton campaign."

"Oh! you may dismiss that hope! In my letter, this morning, from Lady Cosmo Somerset, there was an account of the Duke of Lisborough's arrival at Wiesbaden. The duchess, it appears, affects *petite santé*, by way of an apology for being at length compelled to coincide with her husband's wishes; and drinks the mineral waters of every bathing-place she visits, in order that no one may suspect her of making a tour of pleasure at the instigation of the duke."

"What absurdity!—Besides, since Lady Grayfield's ridiculous marriage with Béthizy, her worshipful tribe of the All-Excellents has fallen into so much disrepute, that I should think even the sulky Anastasia herself might forswear the clan without regret."

"Nay! Lady Grayfield assures the world that she married Béthizy—totally disregarding her own feelings of repugnance—in order to extend her sphere of usefulness, by making the *roué* a proselyte to the virtuous principles of her sect."

"I never saw a woman more romantically in love than she was when we left town; or more insolently contemptuous than Monsieur de Béthizy, in his bearing towards her."

"Henry Mulgrave assured me that he had been heard to say openly, at supper, at Crockford's, how carefully he had paid his court to every heiress and co-heiress within the bills of mortality, before he could make up his mind to sacrifice himself to the jointure of such an ill-conditioned old fanatic as Lady Grayfield."

"In good truth, they appear worthy of each other!—Well;—what have you decided? are our dresses to be green or russet for this forlorn hope of an archery-meeting?"

"Nay, choose for yourself, Nelly! For my part, now we have ascertained that the Basingstokes are to be of the

Combe Abbey party, I have given up all interest in the business ;—I have no wish to be extinguished by the brilliancy of Lady Basingstoke's bridal diamonds."

"If it were not for the chance of meeting young Lord Newford, and Sir John Russell, (by the way, Claudia, mamma assures me that the estates go with the baronetcy, and that old talkee-talkee is now worth looking after,) if it were not for the prospect of meeting *them* at the balls, I would give up this archery scheme altogether. That impertinent Sir Comyne Wallace will be at the Abbey ; and his supercilious airs will mar all my enjoyment of——but who have we here ?—a travelling carriage in the avenue, I protest !"

"Can it be Lord Stapylford ? This change of wind may possibly have brought in the India fleet."

"Do you perceive any arms on the chariot ?"

"Neither arms nor liveries are visible ; only a valet in the rumble. I am completely puzzled. Can it be any of our London set ? Surely you expect none of your old danglers ?"

"The traveller is getting out, whoever he may chance to be ;—at present I can only decide that he is tall and young——"

"And frightful !—for the mysterious stranger is neither more nor less than our tiresome cousin, Charles Willingham."

"What *can* he come boring here for ? This is the second time his identity has perplexed and disappointed me !"

"Tiresome as he is, Charles will prove a godsend at Bensleigh !—*Faute de mieux,* he will serve to ride and walk with. Nay ! I should not be surprised, Nelly, if we were to quarrel and pull caps for him before his visit is over ; Heddeston Court would do very well as a last resource for either of us."

While Eleanor and Claudia were thus preparing themselves for the conquest of their cousin, Miss de Vesci, wholly unconscious of his arrival, was pursuing her evening walk, wrapped in a reverie which did not admit of her perceiving Charles Willingham's approach, till he was within

a few paces of her in the shrubbery. While her sisters had left the library to put a few improving touches to their disorderly domestic toilet, under pretence of announcing his arrival to Lady Maria, Charles had profited by the butler's hint that his young lady was walking in the shrubbery, to hasten to the presence of his dear Minnie. He did not, however, appear surprised by the embarrassment of her welcome — he had expected her to be depressed in spirits; and when she accepted his arm to return to the house, from which they were still distant, he was very little astonished to find her silent, and cold in her demeanour, and tremulous in her step and gesture.

"You have heard from Lord Lorimer?" enquired Mr. Willingham, after an awkward pause.

"I have," she replied, again relapsing into silence, which for many minutes and many paces remained unbroken.

"My dear Minnie!" at length resumed her cousin, "pardon me for thus alluding to a topic which gives you pain; pardon me if I presume to express the sympathy of a friend in this bitter trial of your affections."

Miss de Vesci started. "Lord Stapylford's marriage then is no longer a secret?"

"Neither his marriage nor his motives. The intelligence had found its way into yesterday's evening papers; and when I left town, all London was ringing with exultation at the mortification his lordship must have experienced, on discovering that for the inducement of Lady Flora Melrose's fifty thousand pounds, he had forfeited the betrothed hand of Miss de Vesci — and fifteen thousand a year! There were others, however — others who loved you, Minnie — whose exultation was founded upon very different grounds; and who, while they grieve that your heart should be distressed by the insult thus offered to its disinterested attachment — rejoice that you should have escaped the impending evils of so detestable a connection. Among these I trust you will class your cousin Mary and myself."

"No! no — *not Mary*" — exclaimed Miss de Vesci, whose complexion had varied with her emotions of surprise

and vexation, during the foregoing explanation. "Whatever may be your own opinions on the subject, Lady Lorimer at least does me justice; Lady Lorimer has long been aware that time and womanhood have rendered me sincerely ashamed of my girlish predilection in favour of Lord Stapylford; and I have this morning received my guardian's congratulations upon my escape from all further entanglement."

"And Mary has unkindly withheld this satisfactory information from me! And yourself, Minnie, why have you allowed me to grieve over the supposed existence of a passion thus fortunately extinguished?"

"Remember how little you have sought my confidence; I had no reason to believe you interested in my destiny."

"You had every reason — every right! — With *your* intelligence of mind, my dear, dear cousin, you cannot have remained blind to my own long attachment towards you — to my exclusive devotion."

"Miss de Vesci was evidently startled by this abrupt declaration — but she did not withdraw her arm.

"You *must* have seen, you *must* have known that from your earliest hour of childhood no human being has rivalled you in the intensity of my tenderness — even hopeless as it was of exciting the return I sought. Alas! I had no opportunity of deceiving myself with the shadow of a hope! During your very infancy, Stapylford appeared to monopolise your affections; and although the confiding and open character of your feelings towards him agreed very little with my own idea of woman's impassioned love, and would have very imperfectly satisfied my own presumptuous wishes, yet I felt that they could not but lead to a premature engagement, fatal to my happiness, and doubtfully conducive to your own. The event justified my expectations; nay, even surpassed them! for, in the petulance of your self-discontent, you withdrew from me even that degree of affectionate friendship which had hitherto bound us together."

He paused; — till Miss de Vesci replied, in an agitated voice — "You accuse *me* of blindness and self-deception

— let me retort the charge. Any one and every one might have perceived, previous to Stapylford's departure from England, the gradual change of my feelings towards him. First love is but a sorry thing — a flimsy sentiment in almost every female heart. In mine, it arose from the gratified vanity of believing in Lord Stapylford's exclusive attachment; — from the moment I was undeceived on that point, I ceased to blind myself to his faults. An overstrained sense of duty would nevertheless have urged me to share his ruin; — but although I was mortified and humiliated by his unwillingness to accept the sacrifice, I experienced no change of feeling in his favour. I knew that he was incapable of rendering me happy, and soon learned to rejoice in the accidents which had ensured our separation."

"Yet you appeared miserably unhappy during your stay at Heddeston, after Lord Stapylford's departure?"

"I *was* unhappy! — I was dissatisfied with him, with myself, with you all; — I was perplexed with a thousand embarrassments of feeling — I was degraded by a thousand self-accusations — and I felt excluded from the love and confidence of those, to whom alone I might have applied for counsel and consolation. It was not till I went to Naples, and was thrown, through accidental circumstances, into the intimate society of Lord Lorimer, that I found a companion of my own age, who could sympathise in my feelings, and influence my conduct."

"A dangerous counsellor for a young lady to select!"

"No! Charles — I was securely guarded from all future perils of sentiment; — I more than half suspected your sister's secret attachment for Frederick — and my own heart was preoccupied."

"Yet you said just now you had already ceased to love the object of your early engagement?"

"I did say so — I do say so," said Miss de Vesci, pausing in momentary embarrassment. "Why should I hesitate to confess the whole truth? You assure me, dearest cousin, that you love me and have *ever* loved me; why — why should I hesitate to own how long my heart has repaid your attachment?"

It would be difficult to describe the wonder, the agitation, the triumphant joy, with which Charles Willingham received this candid and explicit declaration! For long years past he had been ambitious of no worldly possession beyond that of Minnie's preference; a distinction which he had believed to be impossible of attainment. And to hear it thus confessed — thus feelingly proclaimed — was a reverse almost beyond his powers of faith. He was eager to obtain a further explanation of all the incomprehensibilities of the case; and he drew his lovely cousin unresistingly towards the green depths of the shrubbery, that no interruption might invade his present prospect of happiness.

Now that the first bewildering confession had been made, the explanation was sufficiently easy, even to the susceptible delicacy of Miss de Vesci. She acknowledged that on her arrival in Italy she had long meditated a rupture with Lord Stapylford; and that, by the advice of her cousin's bosom friend, Frederick Lorimer, she was on the point of acquainting him by letter with her change of sentiments in favour of another, when the sudden death of her uncle, and the miraculous alteration of her destinies, had added new difficulties to the case: although she had been satisfied that the dissolute Montague would be eager to renounce the hand of the portionless Minnie Willingham, the rich heiress of Bensleigh was persuaded that she had no chance of being rejected. She had herself petitioned the dying General de Vesci to render his young favourite, Mr. Lorimer, the minister of his testamentary generosity towards her; yet, without consulting Frederick, who she feared might advise a more cautious mode of proceeding, she had written to Stapylford, previous to her departure from Naples, proposing his resignation of all future claim upon her hand, in consideration of the forfeiture of half her fortune.

"My dear uncle, who disliked and despised Lord Stapylford," continued Minnie, "had rendered a pecuniary loss the alternative of my maintenance of the engagement between us; and it was natural that I should be willing to

forfeit a much larger sum as the purchase of my freedom. My own knowledge of Stapylford's interested views satisfied me that he would accept my terms ; and my guardian, in confirming my opinion, only affected to lament the lavish measures of my prodigality."

"Heaven knows it was no circumstance for penuriousness ! — Your whole inheritance would have been a trifling sacrifice to ensure so glorious a deliverance."

"Not so ! dear Charles ! — I dared not extend my offer ; for I had the interests of my mother and sisters left at my disposal. Besides, I had resolutely determined never to fulfil my engagement, and Montague could only have interfered to prevent my marriage with another, — an event on which *your* total estrangement," continued Minnie, in a lower voice, "gave me little reason for calculation."

"Mr. Willingham pressed her arm with gratified affection. "Do not call that fellow 'Montague' again ; he was ever unworthy to be blest with such a distinction."

"Still less is he deserving of your jealousy ! But we will speak of him no more."

"*Once* more, dear Minnie ; you must let me know in what terms he contrived to reply to those of your overwrought and delicate generosity in his favour, and to acquaint you with his own breach of faith."

"The letter in which he formally and coldly informed me that, foreseeing the impracticability of our future union, he had consulted his own interests by a marriage with Lady Flora Melrose, the eldest daughter of the governor-general of India, must have crossed mine on the passage : — *mine*, which contained the confession of my love for my cousin Charles, offered in terms of contrite expiation of the offence ! — Thank Heaven ! he forestalled me in my race of inconstancy ; — and, thank Heaven, I retain the consciousness of having acted towards him with honour and with perfect disinterestedness. There will be no occasion for further communication between us ; and even his reply to my foolish conditions was to have passed through the negotiation of Lord Lorimer."

"And must the negotiation of *all* your affairs, my

dearest Minnie, pass in future through Frederick's hands? May I not refer to yourself for an explanation of your present views — your present feelings?"

"No persons are better acquainted with them than Lord Lorimer and Mary; and I am grateful to them for the good faith with which they have hitherto guarded my secret from your suspicions."

"But you will not persist in this unkind reserve?— You will not retract the concession by which you repaid just now my long, long years of hopeless devotion?"

"No!" replied Minnie, overcoming her reluctance, and frankly offering her hand to her enraptured cousin. "No! — I have suffered enough from concealment; — henceforth be all my thoughts and all my feelings open to your investigation. It would be difficult to point out two persons, who, loving each other with truth and constancy like ourselves, have laboured so hard to ensure their mutual wretchedness."

"It is true that I have made a miserable lover," said Mr. Willingham, gazing with delight upon the beautiful face that smiled on him so fondly; "but my devotion as a husband shall compensate for past omissions. All my days of happiness are before me; — promise me, dearest Minnie, that not one of them shall be clouded by further coldness or caprice?"

This engagement was very readily made and accepted; and Miss de Vesci, in announcing her intended marriage to her mother and sisters that night, had the satisfaction of finding that their surprise far exceeded their disinclination for the measure. They were far more willing that Minnie should unite herself with her cousin Charles, than with Stapylford, or any of the numerous suitors who had assailed her in the course of her season of heiress-ship; for they felt assured that a person so conscientious as Mr. Willingham would desire to pass the greater portion of his time at Heddeston Court, with his infirm father; leaving Bensleigh Park for the present to their own occupation. This measure, however, was proposed by Miss de Vesci herself, to whom Heddeston was as much endeared by early asso-

ciations as to her lover; while Charles, on the contrary, was the first to suggest that the sum assigned by her uncle to the Westlands, as a *fine* upon her marriage with Lord Stapylford—(and it was evident, by this projected diminution of his niece's fortune, that the old general had been well acquainted with the real character of the young spendthrift)—should be settled upon Lady Maria Willingham, with a survivorship to Eleanor and Claudia. It was surprising how much this unexpected arrangement conduced to the amendment of her ladyship's rheumatism. The opulence showered upon her old age, and Minnie's final succession to the Willingham jewels, which she had resigned so reluctantly into the hands of an ex-Bodham, rescued her from being peevish or nervous during the busy preparations for the wedding; while her daughters already began to reject their humble projects upon Conversation Russell, the new baronet.

Little remains to be said of the circle to which they were attached. Calmersfield Park and Lisborough House luckily afford ample space for the complete estrangement of their noble owners, without coveting the sneers of the public by a formal separation. Lady Desmond has become severely evangelical; and Lady Cosmo Somerset, although she occasionally provokes a reprimand from her lord by her devotion to the pleasures of the world, remains the best of wives and mothers, and the darling of the society in which she moves. Lady Robert Lorton is about to initiate a daughter into the mysteries of the fashionable world; but she has promised both herself and her lovely girl, that she shall maintain a right of free election among the many admirers who have already crowded around her; and even her uncle, the Duke of Lisborough, disgusted with the consequences of prudent and conventional marriages, forgets to urge the dignities of the house of Lorton among the claims instigating her choice. As to Madame la Comtesse de Béthizy, she is said to be grumbling away the remnant of her fractious days in the third story of an hotel in the Faubourg de St. Germain—for Anastasia no longer retains sufficient interest with her husband to secure his man-

œuvring sister a retreat at Calmersfield, from the insolent neglect of Monsieur de Béthizy;—and an unintermitting epistolary interchange of discontents between the baffled patroness and her *élève*, forms the mutual consolation of their useless existence.

The Basingstokes and Lorimers meantime pursue their familiar intercourse with Heddeston Court, under more cheerful auspices. A marriage is talked of between Lucy Barringhurst and Sir Comyne Wallace; and in the numerous connections arising from Georgiana's match, Lady Barringhurst has acquired a degree of importance in society, the absence of which had reduced her to become the proselyte and tool of Anastasia's heartless tribe. It is said, too, that her brother, Mr. Henry Darnham—the curate of Heddeston—is likely to increase the dignity of her family by an alliance with Claudia Willingham; who, at the sober age of twenty-nine, fancies herself to have become a convert to the happiness arising from a calm domestic life;—but this report wants confirmation. Eleanor meanwhile had long been laying siege to the paralytic Sir George Wolryche; whose crutches and flannels do melancholy honour to the ministry of the immortal Ude.

Lord Stapylford still remains a yellow courtier at the footstool of his excellency Lord Melrose, his Caledonian father-in-law. Shortly after his marriage, legal instructions, forwarded from India, determined the arrest and imprisonment of Mr. Henry Tichborne—at his lordship's suit; on the strength of certain bonds and acceptances of a character so disgraceful, that few persons acquainted with the circumstances and with the parties concerned, were surprised to learn that Tichborne had terminated his existence in the King's Bench, under an apprehension of further exposure. Of all his fashionable associates, Lady Redbourne alone was supposed to interest herself in the catastrophe; for on finding Mr. Tichborne's private papers had fallen into the hands of his family, she became afflicted with a bilious fever, and retired to her country seat.

It was on occasion of the *mesalliance* of her daughter, Lady Clara, with a handsome adventurer of very question-

able parentage, that a discussion arose in the little circle assembled for the Christmas holidays, last winter, at Lorimer Park. Charles Willingham, who is now a leading public man, and has been elevated to the peerage by the title of Lord Heddeston, was smiling with gentle irony, at an argument between his own Minnie and his sister, Lady Lorimer, upon the prudence and force of first love; — Mary — the grave Mary — insisting in its favour, while the animated Lady Heddeston defined it as the wild effervescence of youth — strongly to be mistrusted, and easily to be subdued.

"I have little to say in favour of its constancy," interrupted Lady Wyndham, who made one of the family party. "For although Gertrude Lorimer was secondary to Mary Willingham in the date of Sir William's affections, I am persuaded he has already forgotten that any woman exists upon this earth besides myself."

"In truth," observed her excellent mother, who occupied a large *fauteuil* by the fireside, contemplating the joyful union of her children and their friends, "in truth, the passion of love, like every other passion, assumes the colour and tone of the character in which it exists. In that of my dear Mary and of Lord Heddeston, we are satisfied of its sterling qualities, and are willing that it should stand the test of time. In dispositions of a more volatile nature — dearest Lady Heddeston, forgive me that I include yourself and my own Frederick in this definition — Providence has fortunately decreed that its character should be as evanescent as it was vehement and premature."

"But in either case, how would you wish to find its influence act upon the destiny of the parties?"

"I would have the impulses of youthful affection form *one* among the various arguments in favour of an offered marriage; for the sentiment of love, if not indispensable to the happiness of wedded life, bestows a charm upon human existence such as no moral or worldly advantage can impart. Nay! Lady Heddeston, do not shake your head in reproof of my lukewarm tribute to the omnipotence of your favourite passion. Believe me, I am justly

sensible of its value among the qualifications of wedlock; believe me, I am no advocate for interested or ambitious marriages. Although I have lived until the year 1830 — I do not wish to disavow my sovereign contempt for the plots and manœuvres of fashionable MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS."

THE END.

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